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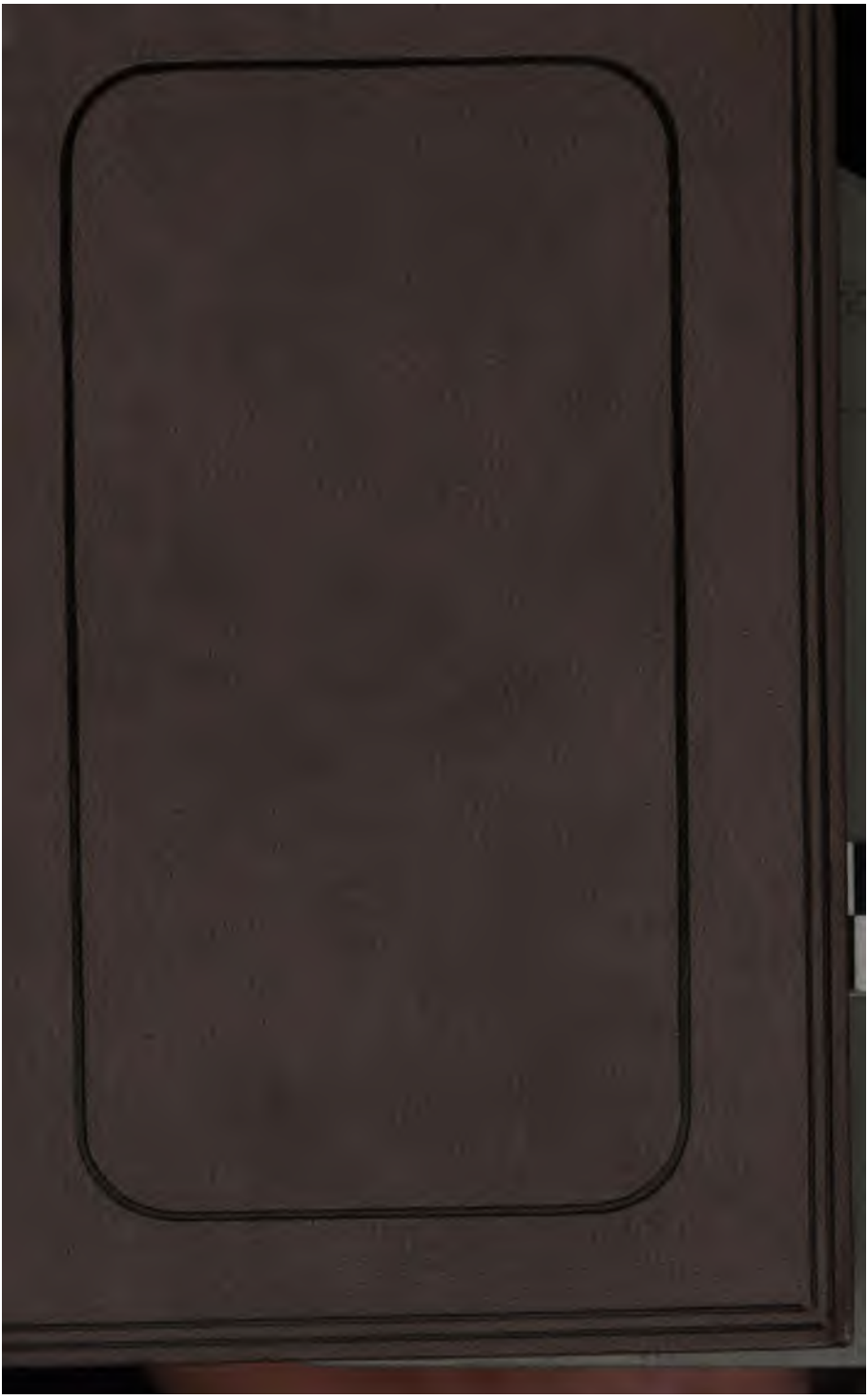

HE THAT WILL NOT WHEN HE MAY

HE THAT WILL NOT WHEN HE MAY

BY

MRS. OLIPHANT

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOLUME II.

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CHAPTER I.

At Markham Chase there had been great wonder and consternation at the sudden departure of the elders of the family. Bell had been called to her mother's room in the morning, and the morals of the house, so to speak, placed in her hands. She was thirteen, a great age, quite a woman. "Harry will help you: but he is careless, and he is always out. You will promise to be very careful and look after everything," Lady Markham had said. Bell, growing pale with the solemnity of this strange commission, gave her promise with paling cheek, and a great light of excitement in her eyes; and when they heard of it, the

others were almost equally impressed. "There is something the matter with Paul," Bell said; and when the carriage drove away the solemnity of the great house all to themselves made a still greater impression upon them. It is true that Mrs. Fry showed signs of thinking that she was the virtual head of the establishment, and Brown did not pay that deference to Bell's orders which she expected as mamma's deputy to receive; but still they all acknowledged the responsibility that lay upon them to conduct themselves better than girls and boys had ever conducted themselves before. The girls naturally felt this the most. They would not go out with their brothers, but stayed indoors and occupied themselves with various rather grimy pieces of needlework begun on various occasions of penitence or bad weather. To complete them felt like a proper exercise for such an occasion; and Bell caused the door to be shut and all the windows in front of the house. She and Marie established themselves in their mother's special sanctuary—the west room; where after a while the work languished, and where the elder sister, with a sense of seniority and protection, pointed out all the pictures to Marie, and gave her

their names. "That is me, when I was a baby," said Bell, "just below the Rafil."

"The Raffle," said Marie. "I thought a raffle was a thing where you drew lots."

"So it is," said the elder with dignity, "but it is a man's name, too. It is pronounced a little different, and he was a very fine painter. You know," said the little instructress with great seriousness, "what the subject is—the beautiful lady and the little boy?"

"I know what they all are quite well," said Marie, impatient of so much superiority; "I have seen them just as often as you have. Mamma has told me hundreds of times. That's me too as well as you, underneath the big picture, and there's Alice, and that's papa—as if I didn't know!"

"How can you help knowing Alice and papa; any one can do that," said Bell; "but you don't know the landscapes. That one is painted by two people, and it is called Both. At least, I suppose they both did a bit, as mamma does sometimes with Alice. There is some one ringing the bell at the hall door! Somebody must be coming to call. Will Brown say 'My lady is not at home,' or will he say 'The young ladies

are at home,' as he does when Alice is here? Oh, there it is again! Can anything have happened? Either it is somebody who is in a great hurry, or it is a telegram, or, Marie, quick, run to the schoolroom and there we can see."

As they neared the hall they ran across Brown, who was advancing in a leisurely manner to open the door. "Young ladies," said Brown, "you should not scuttle about like that, frightening people. And I wonder who it was that shut the hall door."

Bell made no reply, but ran out of the way, and they reached the schoolroom window in time to see what was going to happen. At the door stood some one waiting. "A little gentleman" in light-coloured clothes, with a large white umbrella. There was no carriage, which was one reason why Brown had taken his time in answering the bell. He would not, a person of his importance, have condescended to open the door at all but for a curiosity which had taken possession of him, a certainty in his mind that something of more than ordinary importance was going on in the family. The little gentleman who had rung the bell had walked up the avenue slowly, and had looked

about him much. He had the air of being very much interested in the place. At every opening in the trees he had paused to look, and when he came to the open space in front of the house, had stood still for some time with a glass in his eye examining it. He was very brown of hue, very spare and slim, exceedingly neat and carefully dressed, though in clothes that were not quite like English clothes. They fitted him loosely, and they were of lighter material than gentlemen usually wear in England; but yet he was very well dressed. He had neat small feet, most carefully *chaussés;* and he had carried his large white umbrella, lined with green, over his head as he approached the door. When Brown threw the great door open, he was startled to see this trim figure so near to him upon the highest step. He had put down his white umbrella, and he stood with a small cardcase between his finger and thumb, as ready at once to proclaim himself who he was.

"Sir William Markham?" he asked. The little cardcase had been opened, and the white edge of the card was visible in his hand.

"Not at home, sir," said Brown.

"Ah! that's your English way. I am not a novice, though you may think so," said the little gentleman. "Take in this card and you will see that he will be at home for me."

"Beg your pardon, sir," said Brown. Though he had no objection to saying "not at home" when occasion demanded, he felt offended by being supposed to have done so falsely when his statement was true. "Master is not a gentleman that has himself denied when he is here. When I say not at home, I mean it. Sir William left Markham to-day."

"Left to-day!—that is very unlucky," said the stranger. He stood quite disconcerted for the moment, and gnawed the ends of his moustache, still with the card half extended between his finger and thumb. "You are sure now," he added in a conciliatory tone, "that it is not by way of getting rid of intruders? I am no intruder. I am—a relation."

"Very sorry, sir," said Brown; "if you were one of the family—if you were Mr. Markham himself, I couldn't say no different. Sir William, and my lady, and Miss Alice, they went to Oxford this morning by the early train."

"Mr. Markham himself—who is Mr. Markham?" he said, with a peculiar smile hovering about his mouth. "I am—a relation; but I have never been in England before, and I don't know much about the family. Is Mr. Markham a son, or brother—perhaps brother to Sir William?"

"The eldest son and heir, sir," said Brown, with dignity. "You'll see it in the *Baronetage of England* all about him, 'Paul Reginald, born May 6, 18—.' He came of age this year."

The brown face of the stranger was full of varying expression while this was said—surprise, a half amusement, mingled with anger; emotions much too personal to be consistent with his ignorance of the family history. Strange, when he did not know anything about it, that he should be so much interested! Brown eyed him very keenly, with natural suspicion, though he did not know what it was he suspected. The little gentleman had closed his card-case, but still held it in his hand."

"So," he said, "the heir; then perhaps he is at home?"

"There is nobody at home but the young ladies and the young gentlemen," said Brown, testily. "If any of

the grown-up ones had been in the house or about the place, I'd have said so."

Brown felt himself the master when the heads of the family were away, and this sort of persistency did not please him.

"I'd like to see the young ladies and gentlemen," said the stranger. I'd like to see the house. You seem unwilling to let me in; but I am equally unwilling to come such a long distance and then go away ——"

"Well, sir," said Brown, embarrassed, "Markham Chase, though it's one of the finest places in the county, is not a show-place. I don't say but what the gardener would take a visitor round the gardens, and by the fish-pond, and that, when the family are away; but it has never been made a practice to show the house. And it cannot even be said at present that the family are away. They've gone on some business as far as Oxford. They might be back, Sir William told me, in two days."

"My man!" said the stranger, "I can promise you your master will give you a good wigging when he hears that you have sent me away."

"A good—what, sir?"

Brown grew red with indignation; but all the same a chill little doubt stole over him. This personage, who was so very sure of his welcome, might after all turn out to be a person whom he had no right to send away.

"I said a wigging, my good man. Perhaps you don't understand that in England. We do in our place. Come," he said, drawing out the card, and with it a very palpable sovereign, "here's my name. You can see I'm no impostor. You had better let me see the house."

The card was a very highly glazed foreign-looking piece of pasteboard, and upon it was the name of Mr. Augustus Markham Gaveston, at full length, in old English characters. And now that Brown looked at him again, he seemed to see a certain likeness to Sir William in this pertinacious visitor. He was about the same height, his eyes were the same colour, and there was something in the sound of his voice—Brown thought on the whole it would be best to pocket the indignity and the sovereign, and let the stranger have his way.

"I beg your pardon, sir," he said; "Sir William didn't say nothing to me about expecting a relation,

and I'm not one that likes to take liberties in the absence of the family; but if so be as your mind is set upon it, I think I may take it upon me to let you see the house."

"I thought we should understand each other, sooner or later," said the stranger, with a smile. "Sir William could not tell you, for he did not know I was coming," he said, a moment afterwards, with a short laugh. "I've come from—a long way off, where people are not—much in the way of writing letters. Besides, it is so long since he's seen me, I dare say he has forgotten me: but the first glance at my card will bring it all back."

"I don't doubt it, sir," said Brown. He had taken the sovereign, though not without doubts and compunctions, and now he felt himself half unwillingly bound to the service of this unknown personage. He admitted him into the hall with a momentary pang. "The house was built by the great-grandfather of the present baronet," he said. "This hall is considered a great feature. The pillars were brought from Sicily; they're no imitation, like what you see in many places, but real marble. On the right is the dining-room, and

on the left the drawing-room. There is a fine gallery which is only used for balls and so forth ——"

"Ah—we'll take them in turn," said the little gentleman. He put down his big white umbrella, and shook himself free of several particles of dust which he perceived on his light coat. "I'll rest here a moment, thank you," he said, seating himself in the same big chair in which Colonel Lenny had fallen asleep. "This reminds me of where I've come from. I dare say Sir William brought it over. Now fetch me some iced water or seltzer, or cold punch if you've got such a thing. Before I start sight-seeing, I'd like a little rest."

Brown stared with open mouth; his very voice died away in the blank wonder that filled him.

"Cold—punch!" he said.

The stranger laughed.

"Don't look so much like a boiled goose. I don't suppose you have cold punch. Get me some seltzer, as I say, or iced water. I don't suppose a man who has been anywhere where there's a sun can do without one of them. Oh, yes, there's a little sun in England now and then. Something to drink!" he added, in peremptory tones.

Brown, though he felt the monstrous folly of this order from a man who had never set foot in the house before, felt himself moving instinctively and very promptly to obey. It was the strangest thing in the world, but he did it, leaving the stranger enthroned in the great chair of Indian bamboo.

Mr. Augustus Markham Gaveston, however, had no inclination to sleep. He sat sunk in the chair, rubbing his hands, looking about him with his little keen blue eyes.

"So this is Markham Chase," he said to himself. His eyes shone with a mischievous eager light. There was a little triumph in them and some amusement. Though he was far from being a boy, a sort of boyish gleam of malicious pleasure was in his face, as if he had done something which it had not been intended or desired that he should do, and thus had stolen a march upon some one in authority. He pulled off his gloves in a leisurely way, finger by finger, and threw them into his hat, which he had placed at his feet. Then he rubbed his hands again, as if ready for anything or everything.

"The dining-room to the right, the drawing-room to

the left, and a fine gallery—for balls and that sort of thing," he repeated, half under his breath.

The little girls had watched anxiously from the schoolroom window as long as there was anything to see. They had seen the little gentleman come in, which filled them with excitement. It was not a telegram, so there was nothing to be afraid of. Their hearts jumped with excitement and wonder. Who could it be?

"I ought to go and see what he wants," said Bell. "Mamma left the charge of the house to me."

"Oh, Bell—a strange gentleman! you would not know what to say to him, though it is only a little gentleman," said Marie.

"Oh yes, I know quite well. I shall ask him if he wants papa, and that I am so sorry there is no one at home—and could I tell papa any message? that is what Dolly Stainforth says."

"She is seventeen," said Marie; "and you—you are only so little—he will laugh at you. Bell, don't go. Oh, I don't like to go ——"

"He is little, too," said Bell. "You can stay away if

you please, but I am going to see what it all means. Mamma left the charge to me."

Marie followed, shy, but curious.

"Oh, I wish the boys were here," she said.

"The boys!" cried Bell, with much contempt. "Who would pay any attention to them? But you need not come unless you like. Mamma left the charge to me."

Whether to be left alone, or to be dragged to the encounter to speak to a strange gentleman, Marie did not know which was worst. It was the first, however, which was most contrary to all her traditions. She scarcely remembered that such a thing had ever happened. So she followed, though ill at ease, holding a corner of Bell's frock between her fingers. As for Bell, she had the courage of a lion. She walked quite boldly through all the passages, and never felt the slightest inclination to run away, till she suddenly caught a glimpse of two neat little feet, protruding from two lines of light trousers, on the other side of the hall. Then she gave a start and a little cry, and clutched at Marie behind her, who was more frightened than she.

They stopped within the door, in a sudden *accès* of fright. Nothing was visible but the grey trousers, the little feet in light cloth boots, and two hands rubbing each other; all the rest of the stranger's person being sunk in the big chair.

When he heard this exclamation, he roused himself, and turned a wideawake head in their direction.

"Ah! the young ladies!" he said. "How are you, my little dears? It is you I most want to see." And he held out to them the hands which had been seen rubbing themselves together so complacently a moment before.

"We are the Misses Markham. We are never spoken to like that," said Bell. Then she collected all her courage for the sake of her duty. "I am the eldest," she said. "Papa and mamma are gone away, if you wanted to see them; but if you have any message you wish to leave ——"

"Come here," he said. "I don't wish to leave any message. Don't be frightened. I want to make friends with you. Come here and talk to me. I am not a stranger. I am a—sort of a relation of yours."

"A relation!" said Bell. And as Brown's solemn step was heard advancing at this moment, the little girls advanced too. Brown carried a tray with a long glass upon it, a fat little bottle of seltzer water, and a large jug of claret-cup. Colonel Lenny had been very thirsty too when he fell asleep in that same chair, but he had not been served in this way. The little girls came forward, gravely interested, and watched with serious eyes while the little gentleman drank. He nodded at them before he lifted the glass to his lips with a comical air.

"My name is Markham as well as yours," he said. "I've come a long way to make your acquaintance. This respectable person here—what do you call him, Brown?—wanted to send me away; but I hope now that you have come you will extend your protection to me, and not allow him to turn me away."

"Are you a cousin?" said Bell.

"Well—perhaps not exactly a cousin; and yet something of that sort."

"Are you one of the Underwood Markhams?" the little girl continued. "The people that nurse says would get Markham if we were all to die?"

"They must be very disagreeable people, I think," said the stranger, with a smile.

"Oh, *dreadful!* They never come here. Nurse says they were in such a way when we were all born. They thought papa was going to let them have it—as if it were not much more natural that Paul should have it! You are not one of those people, are you, Mr.—Markham? Is that really your name?"

"I am not one of those people, and my name is Gus. What is yours? I want to know what to call you, and your little sister. And don't you think you had better take me to see the house?"

"Oh," cried Bell, looking more serious than ever; "but we could not call a gentleman, quite an old gentleman, like you, Gus."

"Do you think I am an old gentleman?" he said.

"Well, not perhaps such a very old gentleman," said Bell, hesitating.

Marie, trusting herself to speak for the first time, said in a half-whisper—

"Oh, no—not very old; just about the same as papa."

The stranger burst into a laugh. This seemed to

amuse him more than the humour of the speech justified.

"There is a difference," he said; "a slight difference. I am not so old as—papa."

"Do you know papa? Do you know any of them? You must have met them," said Bell, "if you are in society. Alice came out this year, and they went everywhere, and saw everybody, in society. Mamma told me so. Alice is the eldest," the little girl went on, pleased to enter into the fullest explanations as soon as she had got started. "That is, not the eldest of all, you know, but the eldest of the girls. She was at all the balls, and even went out to dinner! but then it is no wonder, she is eighteen, and quite as tall as mamma."

"Is she pretty?" said the gentleman.

He went on drinking glass after glass of the claret-cup, while Brown stood looking on alarmed, yet respectful. ("Such a little fellow as that, I thought he'd bust hisself," Brown said.)

"She is not so pretty as mamma," said the little girl. "Everybody says mamma is beautiful. I am the one that is most like her," continued Bell, with naïve

satisfaction. "There is a picture of her in the drawing-room; you can come and see."

"Miss Isabel," cried Brown, taking her aside. There was something important even in the fact of being taken aside to be expostulated with by Brown. "We don't know nothing about the gentleman, miss," said Brown. "I don't doubt that it is all right—still he mightn't be what he appears to be; and as it is me that is responsible to Sir William ——"

"You need not trouble yourself about that, Brown," said Bell, promptly. "Mamma said I was to have the charge of everything. I shall take him in and show him the pictures and things. I will tell papa that it was me. But Brown," she added in an undertone, certain doubts coming over her, "don't go away; come with us all the same. Marie might be frightened: I should like you to come all the same."

Meantime the stranger had turned to Marie.

"Where do you come in the family?" he said. "Are there any younger than you?"

"No," said Marie, hanging her head. She was the shy one of the family. She gave little glances at him

sidelong, from under her eyelids; but edged a little further off when he spoke.

"Are you afraid? Do you think I would do you any harm?" said the little gentleman. "It is quite the other way. Do you know I have brought some sweetmeats over the sea, I can't tell you how far, expressly for you."

"For me!" Marie was fairly roused out of her apathy. "But you didn't know even our names till you came here."

"Ah! there's no telling how much I knew," said the stranger with a smile.

He had risen up, and he was not very formidable. Though he was not handsome, the smile on his face made it quite pleasant. And to have sweetmeats brought, as he said, all that way, expressly for *you*, was a very ingratiating circumstance. Marie tried to whisper this wonderful piece of information to Bell when her interview with Brown was over. But Bell had returned to all her dignity of (temporary) head of the house.

"If you will follow me," she said, trying to look, her sister said afterwards, as if she were in long dresses, and putting on an air of portentous importance, "we will

take you to see the house. Brown, you can come with us and open the doors."

The visitor laughed. He was very little taller than Bell, as she swept on with dignity at the head of the procession. Brown, not quite satisfied to have his *rôle* taken out of his hands, yet unwilling to leave the children in unknown company, and a little curious himself, and desirous to see what was going on, followed with some perturbation. And there never was a housekeeper more grandiose in description than Bell proved herself, or more eloquently confused in her dates and details. They went over all the house, even into the bedrooms, for the stranger's curiosity was inexhaustible. He learned all sorts of particulars about the family, lingering over every picture and every chamber. When the boys came in, calling loudly for their sisters, he put his glass in his eye and examined them, as they rushed up the great staircase, where a whispered but quite audible, consultation took place.

"I say, we want our dinner," cried Harry. "We're after a wasps' nest down in the Brentwood Hollow, and if you don't make haste, you'll lose all the fun."

"Oh, a wasps' nest!" cried Bell; "but we can't—we

can't: for here is a gentleman who says he is a relation, and we're showing him over the house."

"Such a funny little gentleman," said Marie, "and he says he's got some sweetmeats (what does one mean by sweetmeats?) for me."

"I don't care for your gentleman; I want my dinner," cried Harry, whose boots were all over mud from the Brentwood swamp. They both brought in a whiff of fresh air like a fresh breeze into the stately house.

"Miss Isabel," said Brown, coming forward, and speaking in a stage whisper, while the stranger, with his glass in his eye, calmly contemplated all these communings from above, "if the gentleman is really a relation, I don't think my lady would mind if you asked him to stay lunch."

To stay lunch! This took away the children's breath.

"It is a bore to have a man when he doesn't belong to you," said Roland.

"He looks a queer little beggar," said Harry. "I don't think I like the looks of him."

"But he is quite nice," said the little girls in a breath.

Then Bell suddenly gave a lamentable cry—

"Oh, you boys, it is no use even thinking of the wasps' nest. We have all got to go to the rectory to the school-feast."

This calamity put the little gentleman out of their heads. The boys resisted wildly, but the girls began to think better of it, arguing that it was a party, though only a parish party. The introduction of this subject delayed the decision of the question about lunch, until at last a violent appeal from Harry—

"I say, Brown! *can't* we have our dinner?" brought about a crisis.

"You go and ask *him* to come, Harry," said Bell, seized with an access of shyness, and pushing her brother forward. "You are the biggest."

"Ask him yourself," cried the boy. This difficult question however was solved by the little gentleman himself, who came forward, still with his glass in his eye.

"My dear children," he said, "don't give yourselves any trouble. I am very hungry, and when Mr. Brown is so kind as to give you your dinner, I will share it with great pleasure." ("Cheeky little brute—I don't like the looks of him," said Harry to Roland. "But it

was plucky of him all the same," said Roland to Harry.) "Allow me to offer Miss Markham my arm," the stranger added.

To see Bell colour up, look round at them all in alarm, then put on a grand air, and accept the little gentleman's arm, was, all the children thought, as good as a play. They followed in convulsions of suppressed laughter, the boys pretending to escort each other, while Marie did her best to subdue them. "Oh, boys, boys! when you know mamma says we are never to laugh at people," cried this small authority. But the meal thus prepared for was very successful, and the young Markhams speedily became quite intimate with their visitor. He told them he was going to stay in the village, and Harry and Roland immediately made him free of the woods. And he asked them a thousand questions about everybody and everything, from their father and mother, to the school-feast where they were going; but except the fact that he was staying in the village, he gave them no information about himself. This Brown noted keenly, who, though not disposed to trouble himself usually with a school-room dinner, condescended to conduct the service on this occasion, keeping both

ears and eyes in very lively exercise. Brown felt sure, with the instinct of an old servant, that something was about to happen in the family, and he would not lose an opportunity of making his observations. The stranger remained until the children had got ready for their engagement, and walked with them to the village, still asking questions about everything. They had fallen quite easily into calling him Mr. Gus.

"For I am Markham as well as you," he said; "there would be no distinction in that;" which was another source of anxiety and alarm to Brown, who knew that on the visitor's card there was another name.

"Good-bye, Mr. Gus, good-bye!" the children cried at the rectory-gate. The village inn was further on, and Mr. Gus lingered with perfectly open and unaffected curiosity to look at the fine people who were getting out of their carriages at the gate.

"We will tell papa your message," said Bell, turning round for a last word; "and remember you are to come again when they come home."

"Never fear; you will see plenty of me before all is done," he said; and so went on into the village, waving his hand to them, with his big white umbrella

over his head. All the girls and boys who were going to the school-feast, stopped to look at him with wondering eyes. He was very unlike the ordinary Englishman as seen in Markham Royal. But the little Markhams themselves had now no doubt that he was a relation, for his walk, they all agreed, was exactly like papa's.

CHAPTER II.

THE rectory at Markham Royal was a pretty house, situated on a little elevation, with pretty lawns and gardens, and a paddock at the foot of the little height, open to the lawn, where there was a tent erected, and plenty of space for the games. Spectators of the higher class constituted quite another little party in the pretty slope of the gardens, where they were walking about in bright-coloured groups, and paying their various greetings to the rector and his daughter when the little Markhams arrived. Their appearance was a great disappointment to the company in general, and especially to Dolly Stainforth, who was the hostess and the soul of everything that was going on. The rector himself was old, and not able to take much trouble. He had a large family of sons and daughters,

who were all married and out in the world, with the exception of the youngest of all, Dolly, who was a little younger than Alice Markham, and a model of everything that a clergyman's daughter ought to be. Frank, the youngest son, a young barrister, who still called the rectory home, and was generally present on all important occasions, was the only other member of the family in whom Markham Royal took any very great interest; and he was absent to-day, to the great annoyance of his sister, who all the afternoon had been looking out, shading her eyes, directly in the line of the sun, which made the highroad one white and blazing line—looking for the carriage from the Chase, which might, Dolly hoped, bring her the only compensation possible for her brother's absence. Alice was an unfailing aid in all such emergencies, and Lady Markham's gracious presence made everything go well among the great people on the lawn. Also, this time at least, there was another possibility that made Dolly's heart beat. It had been whispered among the girls for some time past that the birthday of Alice being near, and Paul almost certain to come home for that family festivity, he might, in all likelihood, be calculated upon

for the rectory too; in which case Alice and he would remain for supper afterwards, and the day would be a white day. Not many entertainments of a lively description came in Dolly's way. She had to drive out solemnly with her father now and then, and attend garden parties which were not always very amusing, but this day had been marked out as an exception to all others. After the school-feast, which was the laborious part of it, and in which she was to be helped by the people she admired and loved most in the world, there was to be the much more exquisite pleasure of the domestic party after, talks, and songs, and strolls in the moonlight, and a whole little romance of happiness. Frank and Alice, whom it would be almost delight enough to pair together, to see "taking to each other," and Paul— Perhaps it was part of Dolly's training as, in a way, mother of the parish, that she should make her little plans with extreme regularity and perfection of all the details. This anticipation had given her strength for all the preparations of the school-feast. There was no curate to take any share of the responsibility; everything came upon her own small shoulders, young and delicate as they were. But what of that! With

such aid and such a recompense, Dolly did not care what trouble she took. It was her duty in any case, but duty became a kind of Paradise when pursued in company with Frank and Alice and Paul. Alas! the morning's post had brought a letter from Frank announcing his inability to appear. Was it for a serious cause which his sister could accept? Alas, no! only for a cricket match, which he preferred—certainly preferred—to the rectory lawn and Alice Markham. Frank was false, but the others must prove true. When did any one ever know the Markhams to fail? When the four children appeared, Dolly detached herself from Lady Westland, whom with a much disturbed attention she had been entertaining:

"Why are they so late?" she cried.

"Oh, Dolly," said Bell, half pleased to be of so much importance, half sorry to convey bad news; "they are not coming at all! They have gone off to Oxford, papa, mamma, and Alice; there is something the matter with Paul."

Poor little Dolly never could tell how she bore this blow. Suddenly the whole scene became dim before her, swimming in two big tears which flooded her eyes.

She had indeed said to herself that she would not "build upon" the coming of Paul; but Alice at least she had a right to build upon.

"My dear child, what is the matter?" cried Lady Westland, whose eyes were as keen as needles.

Dolly, though she was still blind with the sudden moisture, recovered her wits more quickly than she recovered her eyesight.

"I think I shall cry," she said. "I can't help it. Alice is not coming; and Alice was all my hope. There is no one such a help as she is. I don't know what I shall do without her."

It was a kind of comfort to Dolly to think that Ada Westland would be wounded by an estimate which showed how little her services were thought of; and this, perhaps, though not at all a right feeling for a good little clergywoman, helped her to recover herself, as it was so necessary she should do.

The children were assembling in the paddock, all in their best clothes, with the schoolmistress and the Sunday-school teachers, and a few favoured villagers. There was the tea to make for them, the games to organise, to keep everything going; and all the garden

walks were occupied by idle people who were doing nothing to help, and from whom no help could be expected. Her old maid, who had been her nurse, and who was Dolly's chief support in the household, and old George the old man-servant, who managed the male department at the rectory, were both required to hand tea, and attend upon these fine people, who did all they could to detain Dolly herself, stopping her as she hurried down to the field of action, to tell her that it was a pretty scene. Dolly was far too good a girl, and too thoroughly trained to the duties of her position to dwell at that moment upon her disappointment. But whenever she paused for a moment, whenever the din of the voices and teacups experienced a lull, it came back to her. Poor little Dolly! She had everything on her shoulders.

There was a line of chairs arranged under the lime-trees on the lawn for the great people of the parish—the Trevors and the Westlands—apart from the crowd of smaller people who came and went. Among these few local magnates the rector meandered, and it was to them that old George's services were specially dedicated. They had the best of the tea, which Dolly grudged greatly, and the best position, and the best attendance;

and considered themselves to be doing a duty which they owed to the parish in thus countenancing the school-feast. They considered that they were doing their duty; but at the same time, in the absence of anything better, they liked it as Bell and Marie did, because, such as it was, it was a party, though only a school-feast. Old Admiral Trevor was seated in the sunniest spot—for warmth, as his daughters explained, was everything to him. He sat there, cooking in the heat of the August afternoon with poor Miss Trevor close by, divided between the necessity of being close to him and the love of the grateful shade behind. The old admiral talked a great deal, mumbling between his toothless gums with the greatest energy, and very indignant when he was asked a second time what he had said. Miss Trevor, though she was deaf and used an ear-trumpet, always heard her father, and was very quick and clever in interpreting him, so as to save what she called "unpleasantness." Beside the Trevors were the Westlands—the whole four of them—father, mother, son, and daughter. They were new people, and therefore deeply impressed with the necessity of "countenancing" the parish in which they had bought a house and park,

and which they tried to patronise as if it belonged to them. They were very rising people, very rich, and fond of finding themselves in good company, even at a school-feast; for naturally such people get on much better in town, where there are all sorts of visitors, than in the country where everybody knows all about their pedigree and belongings. Dolly's only real help was Miss Matilda Trevor, the second daughter of the admiral, a plain, good woman, but so shortsighted that she had to put her nose into everything before she could see it. Some of the smaller lights of Markham, Mrs. Booth, and her niece, from Rosebank, and young Mrs. Rossiter, the doctor's wife, might have been of a little use; but their heads were turned by the offer the rector inadvertently made of the chairs reserved for the Markhams on the lawn. When they had such a chance of distinction, of making their "position" quite apparent, and showing their equality with the county people, who could wonder that these ladies threw over the children, and Dolly, though not without many compunctions? Poor ladies! they did not make very much of it; they talked to each other which they could do any day, and now and then got a word from Miss Trevor, who poked

out her trumpet for the answer, frightening Mrs. Rossiter out of her wits.

This, however, accomplished Dolly's discomfiture, leaving her altogether to herself. It was a pretty scene, as everybody said. The people who were walking about the garden dropped off as the afternoon went on, but the great people sat it out; though they paused to say it was a pretty scene, they were busy with their own talk, and had nothing else to do that was of any importance. The admiral had got into an argument with Lord Westland about the new ironclads—if argument that could be called which consisted of vituperation on the part of the old sailor and amiable remonstrances from the new lord.

"Ships," the bigoted old seaman cried, the foam flying from his lips, "I doncall'em ships." He ran his words into each other, which made him very difficult to understand. "Shtinking old tin-kettles, old potshanpans, that's what I call 'em. Set a seaman afloatin'em shlike puttin'emdownamine. I don' callit afloat."

"My dear sir," said Lord Westland, blandly, "there may be something in what you say; but we might as well try to confine the waves of the sea, as a certain

king did, as to keep back science. Science, admiral, must have her way."

"Let'erhav'erway," cried the old man, "down to the bottom if sheshamind. One good seamansh worth more 'ana shipload o'ph'losophers. Let'emman'erownships; let'em man their own ships. Crew o'ph'losophers 'shtead o'seamen. Bust their boilers's often 'shtheylike and devil a harm."

"He says the new ships should have crews of philosophers," said Miss Trevor, tranquilly, putting up her hand to silence the anxious "I did not catch your last remark," to which Lord Westland was about to give utterance. The peer shook his indulgent head.

"My dear admiral, philosophers, though it may please you and me, who are old-fashioned, to rail at them, are rapidly becoming the masters of the world."

"Mashters-o-fiddlshticks," said the old sailor. "Put-'emdown the d——d ratholes, shee how theylikeit'emshelves. Old coalmines under water, call that a ship! None o' God's air, noneoGod's light—all machines an'gasburnersh. Smash 'erownconsortsh—run every thin' down—'chept enemish!" he sputtered forth

triumphantly, with a laugh of angry triumph in his own argument.

"He says they run everything down, except the enemy," said Miss Trevor. "I should like myself to know why there are so many collisions nowadays. My father says it is all science and boilers. Why is it, Lord Westland?" And she put up that ear-trumpet, of which everybody was afraid, for her noble neighbour's use.

"Did you hear that last piece of news about the Markhams?" said Lady Westland. "All off at a moment's notice, the very day they were expected here. They really ought to have waited and showed themselves, and not given colour to all the stories that are about."

"Are there stories about? I have not heard any. Markham only came home two days ago. Do you mean about the ministry? Is it supposed to be insecure?"

"Oh no," cried Lady Westland, with an ineffable smile. "The ministry!—oh no, Mr. Stainforth; that is much too well secured with the best and most influential support. The opposition need not trouble themselves about that."

Lady Westland looked at her husband with honest admiration. He was a consistent supporter of government—and standing, as he did, with his legs wide apart and his shoulders squared, anticipating with dread the necessity of speaking into the trumpet and preparing himself for the effort, he looked a very substantial prop.

"Ah, to be sure," said the rector. "I forgot for the moment we take different sides."

"My dear rector, how you, a dignified clergyman and a man of family, can take the Liberal side!" said Lady Westland. "It seems more than one can believe. But, oh no—oh dear no! of course I would not for the world say a word to weaken old ties or change convictions. An opinion that has stood the test of years is a sacred thing. But I did not mean anything political. Don't you know, dear Mr. Stainforth, the very sad stories that are told everywhere about Paul?"

"What has Paul been doing?" said the old rector. He did not himself very much approve of Paul. Staying up to read was a new sort of idea which had not been thought of in his day. He did not much believe in young fellows reading when a set of them got together. "Much more likely they are staying up

for some mischief," he had said when he heard of it, and in consequence he was not disinclined or unprepared to hear that there were stories about Paul.

"Did not you hear what he did? He brought some frightful Radical agitator, some public-house politician —so they say—to the Chase, and made poor Lady Markham take him in, and gave her all sorts of trouble. I believe Sir William has scarcely spoken to him since for being so silly. But we all know what a devoted mother Lady Markham is. For my part, I think one's husband has the first claim. And now they say he is inveigled into some engagement, and is going to be sent off to the Colonies and got rid of in that way."

"I think there must be some mistake," said the rector. "Men don't send their heirs to the Colonies, nor get rid of them, except for very serious causes."

"Oh, I am so glad you stand up for Paul! I will never believe it," said Ada Westland. "Paul inveigled into any engagement! How could you believe it, Mr. Stainforth? He is as proud as Lucifer. He thinks none of us fit to pick up his handkerchief. Oh, I know, we are all supposed to be on our promotion, waiting till he may be pleased to look at us. I—and

Dolly too——but he never did condescend to look at us. If he were to marry, after that, a girl off the streets ——"

"Ada, my love, for Heaven's sake, take care how you talk!"

"Oh, there is nobody but the rector, mamma, and he knows we girls are not such fools as we are made to look. If Paul Markham were to marry that sort of person, I should laugh. It would be our revenge—Dolly's and mine—whom he never would condescend to look at. It would be nuts to me."

"Did you ever hear anything so vulgar?" said Mrs. Booth to Mrs. Rossiter. "I never could abide that girl. They have all thrown her and themselves at Paul Markham's head. New people as they are, and shoddy people, they would give their eyes to have her married into such an old county family."

"But it is not true about Dolly," said the doctor's wife. "Dolly has not such a notion in her head. Her mind is full of the parish, and her father, and Frank. I don't believe such an idea as getting married ever crossed her mind at all."

"Hem!" said Mrs. Booth, with a doubtful little

cough, "I should not like to swear to that. What did you say, Lady Westland—haven't I heard it? Well, I have heard something about strange visitors. It appears there have been several people at Markham lately whom nobody has been asked to meet."

"That is very significant; I call it very significant. When one's own friends cease to introduce their friends to us, it is a token that all is not well. Don't you think so?" said Lady Westland, softly smiling on the doctor's wife.

Mrs. Rossiter's sympathies were all with the victims who were being assailed. But the Westlands were very fine people, much more "difficult to know" than the Markhams, and the doctor had not yet got a very distinct footing at the Towers. His young wife thought of her husband's position, and acquiesced with a sigh.

"But it is not like them," she said. "The Markhams are so hospitable; they are such nice people; they are always kind."

"Yes, they ask all sorts of people. It is extraordinary the people one meets there," Lady Westland said; which made Mrs. Rossiter's cheek flame, and was a very just recompense to her for her infidelity. And

then there was a pause, and the boom of Admiral Trevor's bass, and the titillation of his sh's came in like the chorus. He was still holding forth on the subject of the *Devastation.*

"I don't wish 'em any harm," said the old sailor; "I wish-e-may all go down in port like that one t'other day. Wish-em wher-er shure to be looked after. No, blesh us all—no harm!"

Meanwhile the games were going on merrily enough in the paddock. Dolly flew about for three people. She set the little ones afloat in one game, and the big ones in another. The Markhams were still her best allies, Bell throwing herself into the rounds and dances of the infants with characteristic vigour; but Harry and Roland stood apart and whispered to each other, with their hands in their pockets. They would have taken the boys off to play cricket, had that been in the programme.

"No, I will not have it," Dolly said. "For once in a way they shall be together. It's bad enough when they grow up, when all the boys troop off for their own pleasure, and never think what the girls are doing. It's time enough to break up a party and make sects when

they're grown up," Dolly said. The boys stared, and did not understand her. But it was natural enough that she should be angry. Frank's cricket match was rankling in his sister's mind. And Dolly thought that "for once in a way" Paul Markham might have thought of old friends. It was sure to be his fault that even Alice had failed her; Dolly had no idea how it could be his fault, but she was sure of it. Her heart was full of fury as she flew about from one group of children to another, struggling against their tendency to fall into detached parties, and let the amusements flag. "It is far more their parish than it is mine; they will always have it," she said to herself. When it began to be time for the children to disperse, and the conclusion of her labours approached, she was so far carried away by her feelings as to forget that the Miss Trevor who had helped her with the tea, but had been standing helplessly about since, always in the way, was the short-sighted one, and not the deaf one. "Oh, I wonder why all these people don't go away?" she cried. "Haven't they got dinners waiting at home? Why do they stay so long? I am sure I don't want to have to go and entertain them after the children go away." And then

poor Dolly recollected with horror that Mrs. Booth and Mrs. Rossiter were to stay for a high tea, and that the doctor was to come in to join them. "Oh," she cried, in her vexation, "I shall not get rid of them to-night."

"Of whom are you speaking, my dear?" said Miss Trevor, astonished—which brought Dolly to herself; and, fortunately, Miss Trevor could not see that it was her own party, and the rest of the people on the lawn, whom Dolly meant. "I am afraid we must be going very soon," she added, with regret. "I am sorry not to stay and help you to the end. But dear papa must not be exposed to the night dews."

Dolly had to marshal the children for a march round, leading them in front of the company on the lawn, and conducting the chorale (as the schoolmistress called it) which they sang before they broke up. This was what the fine people had remained for, and all the parish would have been disappointed had they not stayed. But, notwithstanding, it was hard upon her, tired as she was, to have to stand and receive their compliments, and to be told that it had been "such a pretty scene."

"I enjoyed it very much," said Lady Westland, "I

assure you; I only came to do a duty and countenance you, my dear Dolly; but I quite enjoyed it."

"We came to scoff, and we remained to play," said Ada; while Lord Westland squared his shoulders, and threw out his chest, and repeated his wife's observation about the pretty scene.

"And I hope you will always calculate on me to give my countenane whenever it is wanted," he said.

Dolly, though so tired, had to stand and smile, and look gratified by all their compliments. And what was worse, when they had all at last been got away, there rose up from behind the chairs on which Mrs. Booth and Mrs. Rossiter, waiting with the ease of *habitués* till all was over, had seated themselves again after their leave-takings, a tall and gawky figure, dark in the fading light.

"Mr. Westland is going to stay, Dolly, to share our evening meal, though I have told him it will be a homely one," the rector said, not without a tone of apology in his voice. Another voice, high up in the air, muttered something about the greatest pleasure. But Dolly took no notice. This was the worst infliction of all. She let herself drop into the wicker-work chair

with the cushions, which Lady Westland had declared to be so comfortable.

"I thought they were never going away," she said with angry candour. "I am so tired. I so wanted a little peace."

The rector and young Westland both knew the meaning of this speech, but neither ventured to reply.

Mrs. Booth, however, stretched out her hand and gave the girl a friendly pinch. "They are the most important people in the county, Dolly."

"No, indeed, that they are *not*," the girl cried loud out. She was not one to desert her friends, even though they might not be so good to her as she had hoped. But as Mrs. Booth's remark had been made in a whisper, no one knew exactly to what this prompt contradiction referred.

At supper Mr. Westland was of course placed at Dolly's right hand. If he was not the most important young man in the neighbourhood, he was nominally of the highest rank, and would no doubt have taken precedence anywhere of Paul Markham. He was very tall, and very lean, an overgrown, lanky boy, with big projecting eyes, which were full of meaning when he

looked at Dolly—or at least of something which he intended for meaning. He did not talk very much, but he gazed at her constantly, which was very irritating to Dolly. Mr. Rossiter was a much more lively person. He came in in a state of high good-humour, which none of the party already assembled shared. Both the ladies who were Dolly's guests had grievances. They had sat on uncomfortable chairs all the afternoon by way of showing their identity with the best families, but the Westlands and the Trevors had taken very little notice of them. The doctor's wife for one felt that she had not been of that service to Dolly which Dolly had a right to expect, and yet that she had not asserted her husband's position in anything like a satisfactory way by this failure in friendship. The supper-table was not as lively as a supper-table ought to be after a bright afternoon out of doors.

"I hope it all went off well," the doctor said as he looked round the languid party, and saw how little response there was in their faces to his cheery address and simple jokes.

"Oh, beautifully!" said young Westland, finding his

voice with an effort; "like everything Miss Stainforth has to do with."

There was no murmur of response; and Dolly gave her champion a glance which drove him back trembling upon himself. Then Mrs. Booth said, stopping her knife and fork, "I think we missed Lady Markham." She said this as if it were a conclusion she had arrived at by a long process of reasoning; and then she returned to her cold chicken with renewed zest.

"That was it," cried Mrs. Rossiter, glad to hit upon something which relieved her own sense of guilt. "It was Lady Markham we wanted. She makes everything go smooth. She makes you feel that she takes an interest in you, and wants you to be comfortable."

"It is a pity," said the rector, "that such a pleasant type of character should so seldom be sincere."

"Papa," said Dolly, "I can bear a great deal—but if any one says any harm of the Markhams I will not put up with it. If they had been here I should not have had everything to do myself. If they had been here those tiresome people would have gone away at the right time, and everything would have gone right. Sincere! Do you think it is sincere

to say nasty things, and get out of temper when one is tired—like me?"

And poor Dolly nearly cried; till the doctor threatened her with a mixture to be taken three times a day; when she made a great effort, and shook off her evil disposition. Besides she had fired her shots right and left, wounding two bosoms at least, and there was an ease to the mind in that which could not be gainsaid.

"But I hear there are unpleasant stories afloat about the Markhams," the rector said at his end of the table. "I hope my old friend, Sir William, has not been remiss in his duties. A father should never give up his authority, even to his wife. I fear among them," he added, shaking his white head, "they have done everything they could to spoil Paul."

"So I hear," said Mrs. Booth, shaking hers. But nobody knew what was the real charge against the Markhams, or what it was that Paul had done. And after Dolly's profession of faith in them, which was something like an accusation against the others, these others might shake their wise heads, and communicate between themselves their adverse opinions. But before Dolly there was not another word to say.

CHAPTER III.

THE rectory of Markham Royal was a very good living —a living intended for the second son of the reigning family when there was a second son; and indeed it was more than probable that Roland Markham, when he grew up, would have to "go in for" the Church, in order to take advantage of this family provision. Sir William, being in his own person the third son of his family, and the youngest, there was nobody who had a claim upon it when he came into possession of the title and estates; for the Markhams of Underwood, who were the next heirs, and who had been very confident in their hopes up to the moment of Sir William's marriage—a wrong which they had never forgiven—had but one son, who was too old to be cut into clerical trim. This was how Mr. Stainforth had got the living. He had held it

for nearly thirty-five years, and had been a good rector enough, jogging on very easily, harming nobody, and if not particularly active in his parish, at least quite amiable and inoffensive, friendly with all the best families, and not uncharitable to the poor. He had a little money of his own, and had kept a good table, and returned to a certain degree the civilities of his richer neighbours. And he had been able to keep a pretty little carriage for his wife as long as she lived, and for his daughter; and altogether to maintain the traditionary position which the rector of Markham Royal had always held in the county. Perhaps an inoffensive man who disturbs nobody is the one who can hold such a position best; just as it is better (though this rule has at present a brilliant exception) for a president of the Royal Academy to be not too distinguished a painter, and even sometimes for a bishop not to be too great a divine. Society prefers the suave and mediocre, and when a man acquires a high place in its ranks by reason of his profession, requires of him that he should be as little professional as possible. Mr. Stainforth was of the good old order of the squire-parson, the clerical country gentleman who respects abuses which are venerable,

and deprecates any great eagerness about the way to heaven. Perhaps he had not very distinct views about heaven at all. Now and then he would preach a sermon about golden gates, and harps, and shining raiment, but it was seldom, if ever, of his own composition. In his own practice he thought it best to think as little about dying as possible, and he did not try to impose a different rule on his neighbours. He thought that it would most likely all come right somehow or other in the end, and that in the meantime there was not much good to be done by too much dwelling on the subject, which indeed is a view of the subject which a great many people are disposed to take. He had lived long enough to see all his sons and daughters established in life, which was a great matter. He had two girls who were very well married, and two sons with capital appointments, besides Frank, who was scrambling for his living somehow, and could manage to "get on"—and Dolly, who was too young to cost very much. There was enough to provide for Dolly when the rector should die—and he felt that he had fully done his duty to his family. And he had done his duty to his parish. There was no more dissent than was inevitable; and

Mr. Stainforth treated it as inevitable, and did not interfere with it. He was very reasonable on this subject—so reasonable that the curates he had generally disagreed with him violently; and he was at the present period taking the duty alone, though it was somewhat laborious, rather than attempt to regulate the young assistant priest who set up confessions, or the muscular young parson who instituted games.

"Let the people alone," was Mr. Stainforth's rule, to which these hot-headed young neophytes without experience would give no faith. Sometimes he would be quite eloquent on the subject. "Let the chapel alone," he would say. "What can we do in the Church with the emotions, especially among the poor? A washerwoman who has feelings wants her chapel. It makes her a great deal happier than you or I could do. All that does the Church good. And let the others peg away at me if they please. It keeps Spicer amused, and keeps him out of more mischief."

Spicer was the village grocer, against whom all the young men hurled themselves and their arguments in vain. But the rector dealt with Spicer, and always had

a chat with him when he passed the shop-door. There was a mutual respect between them.

"But our rector, I don't say nothing against him," Spicer would say at the end of his speech, when there was any demonstration in the neighbourhood in the dissenting interest; "he mayn't be much of a one for work, but he's a credit to the place." There was a great deal to be said for the head of the parish hierarchy who continued to get his things from you, blandly indifferent to the fact that you were a dissenter, and in despite of all those co-operative societies which drive grocers to a keener frenzy than any Church establishment. Lord Westland got all his things down from town, and so did the doctor and the smaller magnates; while even the chapel minister was known to have a clandestine hamper, given out to be a present from some supporter, but arriving suspiciously once a month. The rector, however, never swerved. To him the parish was the parish, and a Markham Royal grocer the proper grocer for Markham Royal—a principle which could not but have its reward.

This was the chief reason, and not economy, as many people said, why Mr. Stainforth did the duty himself,

and had no curate. Dolly was his curate. She had been born in the order, so to speak, and none could recollect the time when she had not felt it her duty to set an example, and carried more or less the burden of the parish upon her shoulders. She had been dedicated, like young Samuel, from her earliest years to the service of the Temple. She set out upon her round of visits every day as regularly as any curate could have done, had her days for the schools, and her clothing clubs, and her mother's meetings, at which the seventeen-year-old creature discoursed the women about their duties to their families in a way which was beautiful to hear. How she could know so much about children was a standing wonder to the women; but it was just as astounding to see her calculate the interest upon elevenpence ha'penny at four and a half per cent; indeed a great deal more miraculous to some of us. She played the organ in church; she took charge of the decorations. She watched all the sick people, careful to observe just the right moment when it was expedient "to send papa;" and the parish got on very pleasantly under the joint sway of the father and daughter. It did not make a very great appearance in the diocesan

lists of subscriptions, and there was no doubt that a great many of the people who had feelings, as the rector said, went to the little Wesleyan chapel. But Mr. Stainforth did not mind that. It was a safety valve, and so was the Bethel chapel, in the nearest town, to which Spicer went every Sunday, which was much less tolerant than Bethesda, and hurled all manner of denunciations against the Church. Sometimes the neighbouring incumbents would warn the rector that his village was a hotbed of mischief, and be very severe on the subject of his excessive tolerance. But Mr. Stainforth was seventy-six, and not likely to live long enough to see any of the great earthquakes with which they threatened him. "There will be peace in my time," he said.

This supineness did not displease Sir William, who, though in opposition, held fast to the old Whig maxims of freedom of opinion, and preferred to conciliate the dissenters, with an eye to the general elections and their political support generally. He went very regularly to church at the head of his fine family, but there was always a consciousness in him that, much as he should regret it, it might possibly be his

duty one day or other to assail the establishment; and he thought it a point of honour not to show any exaggerated attachment to it now which might be turned into reproaches afterwards. Neither did the Trevors object at all to Mr. Stainforth's easy good temper. The things they were afraid of were the Pope, and the Jesuits, whom they supposed to be lurking under every hedgerow. So long as the rector kept ritualism at bay they found no fault with him. The Westlands, however, were very strong on the opposite side. They were people who endeavoured always to do as persons of their rank ought to do, and they liked a high ritual just as they liked high life. Though they "countenanced" the school-feast, and were always ready to do their duty in this way in the parish, yet they never let slip an opportunity of expressing their opinion of the rector's weakness.

"But we have no influence," Lady Westland said. "The living is in the hands of the Markhams. Though they are commoners they were settled here before us, and therefore have the advantage of us in a great many ways."

It was a bold thing to say this in the very district

where it was well known the Markhams had been established for centuries, and where Lord Westland had acquired the Towers by purchase only about a dozen years before. But if there was one quality upon which Lady Westland prided herself it was courage. She was somewhat bitter about the Markhams altogether. There were so many things in which they had the advantage of her. To be sure, she took precedence of Lady Markham whenever they met, and walked triumphantly out of the room before her; but she could not but be aware that in most other ways the baronet's wife had the best of it. The Chase had been in the Markham family for generations, whereas Westland Towers was painfully new; and to come to still more intimate particulars, Paul Markham was a young man of distinction, whereas George Westland, though an honourable, was nothing but an overgrown school-boy. Ada, indeed, was quite as handsome, perhaps handsomer, than Alice, and much cleverer: but she did not receive the same attention. Ada was withal rather a difficult young woman, who gave her parents a great deal of trouble. She took a pleasure in running her talk to the very edge of evil, and made every kind of

daring revelation about herself and her family, putting her mother's secret intentions into large type and publishing them abroad. She liked to see the flutter of semi-horror, semi-incredulity with which her bold sayings were received. She liked to shock people; but perhaps, at the same time, she made a shrewd calculation that, when she published what seemed to be to her own disadvantage, nobody would believe her. This, however, was not so successful an expedient as appeared. When she said that Paul had been expected to throw his handkerchief at her, nobody took it for an impertinent volley of extravagance on her part. It was vain that she involved Dolly in it. In the very faces of her auditors Ada saw the truth reflected back to her; and thus, though she would not have hesitated to marry the heir of the Markhams, she could not excuse the family for what they brought upon her. Lord Westland was not a man to feel the stings which hurt his wife and daughter. He was protected by a much higher opinion of himself; but even he felt a certain annoyance with "my friend Markham," who was listened to more respectfully, and looked up to with much more trust than he. Lord Westland took this as

an instance of the folly and stupidity of country people, but yet he felt it in his heart.

Thus the one family was to the other what Mordecai was to Haman. Lady Westland kept her ears always open to hear anything to the disadvantage of the Markhams. Paul's youthful vagaries, and even the little scrapes which Harry and Roland got into at school she seized upon with eagerness. She was as much interested in chronicling these misdeeds as if they had been so many items to her advantage; but, notwithstanding everything, the Markhams always came off the best. George Westland got into more scrapes at school than all of them put together; and now that he had come home, and had finished his education, what must he do, this heir to a peerage, this only son of so rich and important a house, but go sighing and gaping after Dolly Stainforth, who was no more than the parson's daughter? His mother and sister were driven almost wild by the mere suspicion of this. And not only was it day by day more evidently true, but it even became apparent to them that George for once had reached a point from which he would neither be bullied nor frightened. He let

them say whatever they pleased, but he took his own way.

What Dolly thought of this has been already seen. Dolly, who was angry at her brother's defection and sadly wounded by the failure of the Markhams, resented George Westland's presence more than she did the absence of the others, and turned her back upon him, rejecting his services. She treated him with absolute contumely, impatient of his very look. Why is it that the wrong person will always present himself in such cases? Why, when a girl's fancy is caught by one youth, will another attach himself to her side, and devote himself to her service, to have all the little carelessnesses of the other resented upon him? Dolly had not a word to say to young Westland. She would have liked to have pushed him aside out of her way; and Paul perhaps had not given one thought to Dolly since they danced together at the children's balls at the Chase, while he was still a schoolboy. Thus the threads in the shuttle of life mix themselves up and get all woven the wrong way.

The Trevors were happily beyond the reach of all tremors of this kind. The old admiral lived a kind of

mummy life, swathed in flannels against the rheumatism, and in bandages against the gout, with his food weighed out to him, and his wine measured by the too-scrupulous care of his daughter, whose life was spent in guarding him against cold and indigestion and excitement. Miss Trevor, the eldest, though she was deaf, always heard and understood what he said; but Miss Matilda, the second, never understood her dear papa, and had constantly to have his commands repeated to her. Between her parish work, in which she was assiduous, and her dear papa, this good soul's existence was full. She was very humble-minded, and anxious to please everybody, but yet she was constantly giving offence to Mrs. Booth, whom she sometimes passed in the road, and sometimes brushed against at the church door, without seeing. Thus her inoffensive life was diversified by a succession of little quarrels, wholly unintentional, and which the poor lady could not understand. But these were the only palpitations in her calm existence; and her sister was free even from such agitation. She gave herself up to the housekeeping, and to reading the newspapers, which she did every morning, from beginning to end, specially dwelling

upon all the naval debates and letters about the construction of ships. To give the admiral his "nourishment" at the proper time, to see that the carriage came round exactly at the right moment, to regulate the length of the drive to a moment, this was "a woman's work," and absorbed the admiral's daughter in all the rigidity of routine. Thus life went on—as if it would never end.

As this history is for once to dwell in the highest circles, and deal only with people who may be called county people, and were of the highest importance in the district, it is scarcely necessary to speak of the smaller gentry. There were one or two small proprietors who farmed their own land, or who had so little land that it was scarcely worth farming, who lived about the skirts of the parish, and scarcely counted among its aristocracy. Some of these were so much nearer other parish churches that they did not even come to church at Markham Royal. Sir William Markham owned almost the whole of the parish. He had widened out his borders year by year during the long time he had held the property, and swallowed up various decaying houses of old squires. Such a little villa as Rosebank

could not make any claim to be considered among the very smallest proprietors, and it was more to her devotion to the church than to anything else that Mrs. Booth owed her social elevation. She was very good in the parish. She and her niece visited the poor assiduously, and were familiar every-day visitors at the rectory, and so insensibly saw themselves received everywhere. They were the agents of almost every scheme of social improvement, always ready to act for the greater ladies, who had less time to spare, and content to pick up the crumbs of society from these great folks' tables. Though they were quite insignificant in themselves they were in the midst of everything, and not unimportant members of the society which admitted them on sufferance, yet ended by being somewhat dependent upon them. If ever Miss Trevor enjoyed a holiday from her close attendance on her father, it was when Mrs. Booth had the carriage sent for her before luncheon and came to spend the day, with her dinner-dress and her cap in a little box. She could manage to guess at what the admiral meant, and she would play at backgammon with him, or read the newspapers, while Jane Trevor rested her weary soul in her

own room, writing a detailed report to her aurist, or putting a few new verses into a book with a Bramah lock, which held the confidences of her life. It was Miss Booth who was the most popular of the two at Westland Towers, where Ada liked to have a hanger-on. But in the rectory they were both in their element—more familiar, and constantly interfering with Dolly, whom they both were very fond of, and whom they worried considerably. Rosebank had a balance and pendant in Elderbower, where lived an Indian officer and his family, but the Elders were a large family very much occupied with each other, with the cares of education, and making both ends meet; and consequently they took little part in what was going on, and need not be counted at all.

This was the circle which encompassed the Markhams like a chorus, like the ring of spectators which is always found encircling combatants in all classes. In this arena, round which were ranged all the bystanders, was about to be enacted the drama of their family life.

CHAPTER IV.

MR. AUGUSTUS MARKHAM GAVESTON strolled up the village when the children left him, looking curiously at all the cottages, till he came to the little whitewashed country inn, which called itself the Markham Arms. The little gentleman was full of interest in everything. He stopped and looked in at the windows of the little shop, where everything was sold, from biscuits to petticoats—gazed in with as much interest as if it had been a shop in Bond Street. He crossed over the street to see where the post-office was, and to look at the smithy, where the blacksmith and his journeyman and apprentice paused to push their caps from their foreheads and stare at him, as did also the groom from Westland Towers, very trim and fine, who had brought Mr. Westland's horse to have his shoes looked to. They

all stared, and the stranger returned their gaze with smiling complacency, evidently thinking it quite natural that they should stare at him—a thing to be looked for. And the school children stared at him whom he met on their way to the rectory. Mr. Augustus did not mind. He looked at them all paternally, patting the heads of some of the little ones. The little girls curtsied to him—as you may be sure in schools superintended by Miss Stainforth they had been taught to do—and this pleased him greatly. He took off his hat to them, which astonished the children as much as his white umbrella did, and the strangeness of his appearance altogether. The village was in a commotion, as was natural, by reason of the school-feast, and the arrival of so many carriages and visitors. Half at least of the houses were still pouring forth little bands in their best clothes, mothers and aunts standing at the door to watch the effect. So that it was a kind of triumphal progress which he made through the village street, where everybody was glad to have a new object to occupy them after the children had disappeared. The Markham Arms was not a much frequented inn; but it was as clean and neat as it was quiet and homely,

and there was a pretty little parlour with a bow-window, all clustered with the common sweet clematis, the travellers' joy, and honeysuckle, into which Mrs. Boardman ushered the stranger with secret pride, yet many apologies.

"There is a bigger room up stairs, sir; but if so be as you could do with this till to-morrow——"

"It is the very thing I want," he said; and he bade her send some one to the station for his portmanteaus. "Only the portmanteaus. I don't want the big cases." This dazzled the landlady, and indeed there were found to be three large cases besides the portmanteaus, cases so large that it was all the little station could do to afford them shelter and safety. John Boardman fetched the other boxes himself, and was duly impressed by this evidence of wealth. The name on the luggage, as on the little gentleman's card, was Markham Gaveston; but whether by some freak of the uninstructed artist who had written the name in bold characters of print upon the cases, the Gaveston was small, and the Markham large, so that there was some doubt in the minds of the people, both the station and the inn, which was the name to call

the new-comer by; and what was still more odd, when they asked him, he only laughed and answered, "Which you please," which confused them more and more. He informed John Boardman, however, that he was a relation of the family, but had been in foreign parts all his life, and had never seen Markham before; and, as he brought in the boys from the Chase to dine with him that very evening, there could be no doubt as to the justice of this claim. Also the landlord had a letter to put in the post for him that night which was addressed to Sir William Markham at Oxford. He must be a relation, but who was he? For the next two days the village was very much disturbed by this question. There were old people in the place who were proud to think that they knew Sir William's relations better than he himself did; but who this little gentleman was, and what might be the degree of his cousinship, they found it very hard to make out. He laughed once more when he was asked if he was "a full cousin," or a more distant relation.

"Something of that sort," he said, with a twinkle in his eye, as if this was a capital joke. He was so constantly about, and so ready to make acquaintance with

everybody, that in two days the whole village knew him; and this question weighed upon the mind of the community. At last one of the old women in the almshouses who had spent half her life in the nursery at the Chase, by dint of almost superhuman cogitation, found a clue to the mystery. She remembered that one of the daughters of the late Mr. Markham of Underwood, who was "full cousin" to Sir William, had gone abroad after she became a widow, a very long time ago. Most likely she must have married again and become the mother of this little brown gentleman, who no doubt looked older than he was, being so spare and so brown. This was an explanation that satisfied everybody. The lady's name had been Willoughby when she left England, but what of that? It took a weight off the mind of the village to have the stranger thus made out and set in his right place.

And during the three days he spent in the village Mr. Markham Gaveston made acquaintance with everybody. His curiosity was insatiable. All day long he strolled about and questioned everybody. When he saw old Sophy coming from the woods with her bundle of sticks, he insisted on knowing where she got them, and

how she got them, and all about her. Nothing escaped him. He found out that it was Lord Westland's groom that was at the smithy when he passed, and that the horse belonged to the Honourable Mr. Westland, and that the Honourable Mr. Westland was always finding errands to bring him to the rectory. This information he picked up by the way, as one to whom all news was pleasant; but the Markhams were the real objects of his inquiries. And when the landlady proceeded to intimate that Mr. Westland might save himself the trouble, since Miss Dolly cared more for Mr. Paul's little finger than for all his grandeur, and his title, the little gentleman at once owned the stronger spell.

"So there's a love-story going on, is there?" he cried briskly. "Mr. Paul! that's my young relation, I suppose? Are they going to marry? Come, tell me all about it. This interests me."

"Oh, *marry*, sir; bless you! No, it ain't gone so far as that," Mrs. Boardman cried. And she had to protest that there was nothing but "idle tales" in what she had said—her own silly fancies, as she added, with anxious humility, and bits of gossip among the servants. "You won't say as I said it, sir," she added. "I

wouldn't be the one to make mischief for all the world, nor vex Miss Dolly, so good as she is; and most likely my lady wouldn't like it—and I don't say nothing for Mr. Paul neither. He is mostly away; it isn't what you could call keeping company. Oh, if us women hadn't got no tongues, what a deal o' mischief'd be spared!"

"That's what I'm always telling you," said John.

"And the men's worse," said his wife, going on. "Us women, we lets a thing slip, and never thinks; but the bad stories, them as sets folks by the ears, they always comes from the men."

This amused Mr. Markham Gaveston greatly. He clapped his hands and encouraged them both to continue.

"At her, John!" he said, behind the good woman's back; but John shook his head and retired. He knew better.

And Mrs. Boardman wiped her hands on her apron, and went off "to see to my dinner." The dinner naturally was not hers, but her guest's, who was a small eater—much too small an eater; a single chop was all he had for lunch, a chicken served him two days for dinner. There was little credit in cooking for

any one who was so easily satisfied. To be sure he had suggested one or two eccentric dishes to her when he came, which Mrs. Boardman had never heard of, and which she had declared could not be half so good for any one's "innards" as a plain joint; but since that the stranger had made no remarks, eating what was set before him without remonstrance, but too little of it to please his hostess. He was much more greedy of news than he was of his dinner; and this last piece of information cost him a great deal of thought.

Next day, the third day of his stay at Markham Royal, Dolly Stainforth had a little expedition to make by railway. Though she was far from being an emancipated young lady, and though her father was very careful that she should have in general all the guardianship that her position required, yet to be always accompanied by a servant on the little journeys which she made periodically to see an old aunt only two stations off was a burden Dolly could not consent to: for which reason it had become the habit at Markham Royal to appropriate a vacant carriage to the use of ladies—a carriage over which the guard was supposed to watch, defending it from all male intruders. In this

compartment old George, the man-servant at the rectory, carefully placed his young mistress; and all went on as usual till the very moment before the train started, when old George was gone, and the attention of the guard distracted; when the door of Dolly's carriage was suddenly, swiftly, noiselessly opened, and a little gentleman, in loose, light-coloured clothes, jumped in.

Dolly was so much startled that it was a minute before she found her breath, and in that minute the train had glided from the station.

"I fear I have frightened you," the stranger said.

Dolly was not at all frightened, but she was true to her father's precautions.

"Oh, no; but this is a carriage for ladies," she said.

"Dear me, what a pity!" cried the little man; but it was easy to see by his countenance that he did not think it a pity. "I am a stranger here," he said, "a stranger in England. I don't know all your ways. I will change at the next station if I am disagreeable to you."

"Oh, no," cried Dolly, horrified to be supposed guilty of rudeness. "It is not that. It is only that I am

supposed always to travel by myself. Papa insists on a ladies' carriage. But it does not at all matter," she added, with a glance that was not flattering to the special intruder in question. "Nobody could mind ——"

Dear, dear! Dolly thought to herself, this is ruder still; and blushed crimson.

The stranger, however, did not draw from this any conclusions which were humiliating to himself. People are not so close to mark our looks and words as we imagine them to be. He smiled serenely, and as the train was now plunging along in the fussy yet leisurely manner common to a country train which stops at all the stations, resumed, with an air of great satisfaction and complacency—

"I am very glad you don't mind; for I came into the carriage on purpose—because I saw you get in. I wanted to speak to you," said Mr. Markham Gaveston, with a genial smile.

Then Dolly began to quake a little. Was he mad—or what did he mean? "Do you know me?" she said, faltering. She had heard of the stranger at the Markham Arms, but had not seen him.

"I have the pleasure of knowing who you are," he

said, taking off his hat with the utmost politeness. "My little—relations, the little Markhams, pointed you out to me."

"Oh," cried Dolly again, "then you are ——?"

"Yes, exactly," he said, smiling, "that is what I am. I have come from the tropics, and I do not know much about England. If I say anything that is very unusual, I hope you will excuse me. It is disagreeable that they should be away just when I have come so far to see them."

"Yes," said Dolly, hesitating. She could not refuse to answer him; but to discuss her friends with a stranger was a thing against which her heart revolted. "They did not expect to be away; it was quite unexpected," she said.

"And I have no reason to complain, for they did not know I was coming. All the same, one may say it is disagreeable, don't you think? I have to put up in the inn, instead of being in my—instead of being among my own people."

"Do you know the Markhams, sir?" said Dolly.

She had a way of saying "sir" to men whom she considered old men; but happily Mr. Markham

Gaveston did not know what was his title to so respectful an address.

"I know the little boys and the little girls," he said. "I could wish there were no more."

"Why?"

Dolly turned upon him with a flash of indignation, with eyes wide open and lips apart.

"Ah! what a silly thing to say, wasn't it?" he said. "You may be sure I couldn't have meant it. I want you to tell me about the others—the eldest girl and the boy."

"I! tell you—about the others!"

Dolly grew pale, and then red again. Either he must be mad, which had been her first thought, or else ——

"Yes," he said, quite calmly, "don't be frightened. I want to have a good account of them and that is what has brought me to you."

Once more Dolly stared at him in consternation. She wanted to be angry and think him impertinent, but he was not impertinent.

"Don't be frightened," her strange companion went on. "I want to hear all that is good of them. They tell

me that I won't hear anything that is not good from you."

"Mr.—— sir!—— How can I talk," cried Dolly, with crimson cheeks, "of my friends to you? I—don't know you. Why do you want to question any one about them? Who told you I would say nothing that was not good? Does anybody think," cried Dolly, her eyes flaming, "that I would say either good or bad, for any one, that was not true?"

"I cannot answer so many questions at once," said the little gentleman; "besides, that is not what I want; I want to ask, not to answer. I want to know about my —relations. When I see them, perhaps they may not be very civil to me; they may think me a bore."

"Oh!" cried Dolly, "certainly they will be civil. Alice is too kind for anything else, and Paul—Paul is a gentleman," she said, raising her head. A softness came over the girl's eyes. She had no thought of betraying herself; perhaps indeed she was not aware that there was anything to betray; but in spite of herself, a certain subdued and dreamy glow, a kind of haze of golden light, came into her brown eyes at Paul's name.

"Well, that is something," said the stranger; "you don't think then that they will take to me much? but because the one is kind, and the other a gentleman——"

"That was not what I meant. Am I to pay you compliments to your face?" said Dolly, stopping short and looking suddenly up, half impatient, half amused.

"Certainly, if you wish to," he cried, promptly. "Oh, yes—do not be shy. I should not at all mind a compliment or two; indeed I think I should like them. Do not stand upon ceremony. If you can say seriously that you think me so nice that Alice will like me at once, and your Paul claim me as a brother——"

"He is not my Paul," cried Dolly, with another hot blush. "I do not like such a way of speaking. And, Mr.——"

She paused for his name, but the little man was malicious, and would not give it. He nodded his head two or three times.

"Just so," he said. "That is quite right," smiling with a mischievous smile.

"Mr.—Markham," Dolly said with a burst. "If that is not your right name, it is not my fault. How could

Paul receive you as a brother? You must mean as—an uncle perhaps. Do you know that Paul is only just come of age, and Alice is but six months older than I?"

"Ah," said Mr. Markham Gaveston, stroking his moustache. "I did not think of that," and he looked at her with un expression half comic, half sad, slightly discomfited there could be no doubt. From this he shook himself free, however, and asked suddenly, "How old may Sir William be?"

"Sir William? Oh, quite old," said Dolly. She gave a furtive glance at him this time, anxious to keep on the safe side, and making a calculation in her own mind how old this little brown gentleman himself could be. Fifty, sixty? these two ages were much the same to Dolly. There was not to her any appreciable difference in their extreme oldness and far-offness. Even forty was very old. Her mind wandered hazily, confused on these grey and misty heights. "He is not so old as papa," she said with hesitation, "for papa, you know, was his tutor at college; but he is a great deal older than Lady Markham. He did not marry till he was about—I don't quite know how much—about forty,

I think I have heard people say," said Dolly, with a certain awe in her voice.

"And that seems quite old to you?"

"It is old to be married, is it not? And Lady Markham was so beautiful, everybody says. She is beautiful still. I don't know any one so lovely. I tell Alice often though I love her dearly, she is not half, oh, not a quarter so pretty as her mamma."

"How does Alice like that? It will not please her much, I should think. I should not say that if I wanted her to like me."

The disdain with which Dolly erected her small head, and looked at him!

"That only shows," she said, "how little you know. Any girl would be a great deal more proud of her beautiful mamma than if she were ever so pretty herself. And Alice is very pretty. She has the sweetest eyes you ever saw. Quite blue like the sky—the deep sky. Not this little bit of no colour at all," she said, pointing upwards to the hazy grey-blue of heat: "but the deep, deep sky—the blue-blue behind the clouds. Everything about her is pretty; but she is not so handsome, so beautitul, as Lady Markham.

Being beautiful, and being pretty, are two different things."

Her companion did not pay much attention to Dolly's reflections. He broke the thread of them quite abruptly by asking all at once—

"And Paul?"

"Paul!" Dolly raised her slight figure bolt upright as though she had been fifty. "You are very much interested in Paul, Mr.—Markham; but then you don't know them. I care for Alice most."

He answered by a laugh. What did he laugh at, this very strange disagreeable little gentleman? Dolly had thoughts of turning her back upon him, of saying no more to him, of requesting him to change into another carriage at the station which they were approaching. But after all she did not want to be rid of him. She could not help liking to talk about the Markhams. What could be more natural? Were they not her oldest friends? her nearest neighbours? the people to whom she owed most of her pleasures? It was not doing any harm to them; on the contrary, it might be doing them good. Dolly tried to remember, though her heart fluttered, whether she had ever heard

of any rich uncle or benevolent relation who might intend to surprise them, to come home *incognito*, and find out their characters before he left them all his money. If this was so, might it not be for their very highest advantage that she should talk of them? Mr. Markham Gaveston was the ideal of a rich uncle travelling *incognito*, such as appears now and then in novels. Perhaps he might intend to represent himself as a poor, not a rich, relation in order to try them. Dolly smiled within herself as this idea crossed her mind. Then indeed it was quite certain who his money would come to! He would be received as if he were a prince. Lady Markham and Alice would not know how to do enough for him. They would try to make him forget his imaginary troubles; they would comfort him for all his losses. If this was what he meant to do, Dolly smiled to think of the certain issue. Before she came to this smile, she had made a long circuit in her thoughts, and had half or wholly forgotten the laugh which had for a moment roused her indignation. And when he saw her smile, her companion took it as a sign of amnesty, and himself resumed the conversation.

"Come," he said, "you have told me about the

ladies; it is the turn of the others now; so if you please, let us return to the most important. I want to know about Paul."

"Is he the most important?" said Dolly, doing her best to move her pretty upper lip into a semblance of scorn; then she dropped from this height of proud disdain, and admitted in a cheerful tone, "I suppose he will be to gentlemen. I do not know Paul so well; that is natural. He has been away a great deal—not always at home like Alice; he was at school first, and now he has been nearly three years at Oxford. I have seen him only in the holidays. That makes a great difference," said Dolly, demurely. She looked at her questioner with quiet defiance. If he thought she was going to betray herself a second time! And Mr. Markham laughed too. They established a little tacit confidence on this point—not that Dolly would have owned to it for any inducement—but the stranger was quick, and understood.

"Shall you go and stay with them," she said, beginning to carry the war into the enemy's country, "when they come back?"

"If they will have me," he said.

"Oh, I am sure they will have you. If you take my advice, Mr.—Markham, this is what you must do. Pretend to be quite poor. Say you have lost everything, and that instead of coming to England rich as you had hoped, you have come with nothing. Oh, what fun it will be," cried Dolly. "I will back you up in everything you say. I will pretend you *told* me about it. Do this, Mr. Markham, and you shall see what will happen."

"What would happen in many houses would be that I should be turned to the door. But how do you know that I am not poor? then it would be no fun at all."

Dolly's laugh was a pleasure to hear; it was so honest, and simple, and sure. She had no doubt whatever on the question. Her theory explained everything delightfully. She did not even take the trouble to reply to this suggestion. She said—

"We are coming to the Pemberton station. Do you mean to change here as you said?"

"I will go certainly, if you turn me out."

Here Dolly's laughing countenance suddenly clouded over. She cast at him a quick glance of entreaty.

"Oh, no, don't go, don't go," she cried. And then

she added, in a tone of annoyance, "I think everybody is travelling to-day. Some people are always travelling. It is horrid," cried Dolly, "to see the same faces and hear the same voices wherever one goes."

The cause of this ebullition of temper was easily explained. It was George Westland, very deprecating and humble, who had opened the carriage door.

CHAPTER V.

"GOOD morning, Miss Stainforth."

"Good morning," Dolly replied, with a forbidding face.

"Is there any room in your carriage? I am going only as far as Birtwood."

"There is always room in my carriage," said Dolly, "for it is a ladies' carriage. This gentleman got in in a hurry just as we were starting, but he is to leave if any ladies come and want his place. I could not let any other gentleman come in, but if Ada is with you——"

George Westland's countenance fell. It was a heavy and not a lovely face, but there was feeling in it, and a flicker of hope and pleasure had made his eyes bright. Now the light went out of it suddenly. He uttered a

blank "Oh!" of disappointment, and stood looking at her with a vacant look. Her companion in the carriage was not a likely person to excite any young lover's jealousy, but yet——

"No, Ada is not with me," he said, fixing an anxious look upon the stranger, who had retired to the other window, and was ostentatiously abstracting himself from the conversation. (She would surely never have anything to say to a bit of a little old fellow like that, poor George thought within himself.) He lingered at the window, not knowing what to say more, for conversation was not his forte. At last he remembered a subject which could not fail to be successful. "Have you heard," he said—"but of course you must have heard—that Sir William is ill? He has been to Oxford — something about Paul. What Paul has been doing, I don't know," the young man went on with increasing vigour, "but something to make his people uneasy. And Sir William is ill; some one said just now they were bringing him home to-day."

"Sir William ill! Oh, no, I have not heard anything about it. It must be a mistake," said Dolly,

"for I am sure the children did not know, and they would be sure to hear."

"I am afraid it is quite true," said the young man. But with this he had to make an abrupt disappearance, as the train was about setting off again. When he had gone, Mr. Markham Gaveston drew near from the other end of the carriage.

"I did not want to interfere with your conversation," he said, with comical demureness. "He was not so bold as I; I did not ask leave. But indeed, poor young man, as I am already in possession, it would not have done him very much good."

Dolly did not think it necessary to take any notice, and the distance to Birtwood was very short and left little time for further talk. Her companion, on his side, did not take any notice of the news about Sir William, which Dolly hoped was not true. "The Westlands always know before any one else if there is anything the matter with the Markhams; they seem to like to tell one," she complained, with a contradiction of her own hope. But though he had been so profuse in his inquiries before, the stranger said nothing more now. A certain sternness had crept into his brown face; the habitual

smile, half mocking, half complacent, died away from his mouth, his upper lip set firmly upon the other. But Dolly, who was not very deeply interested in the Markhams' relation, did not notice these changes.

Birtwood was a railway junction, an important place in those regions. All the traffic of the district, all the comings and goings, had to concentrate there. Through all the county it was well known that you were more apt to see your friends at Birtwood than anywhere else. It did not matter where they were going, everybody passed by this point of union. People met as they crossed each other to take the trains up and down; there were all sorts of little services which one could render to another; and it was said that many marriages had been made and friendships cemented during the intervals of waiting which were inevitable, in the tedium of that new ill which modern flesh is heir to—the necessity of waiting for your train. The train in which Dolly and Mr. Markham Gaveston were was a little local train, and therefore used with indignity. It was pushed about, now to one side, now to the other, before it was permitted to approach the platform, another more important line of carriages being brought

up and allowed to disgorge its passengers before the very eyes of the humble travellers who were kept behind, making little runs up and down, though they had arrived before the train which was thus preferred to them. Dolly, though she was used to this, felt it incumbent upon her to put on a show of indignation, for she did not want a stranger to suppose that this was how the trains from Markham Royal were always used. "I will make papa write about it," she said. She was standing in front of the window when at last the train drew up, obscuring the scene for the little man behind, who took it patiently enough. When, however, Dolly uttered a little cry, and, leaning out head and shoulders, made eager signs to some one already standing on the platform, exclaiming, "Oh, Alice! Alice! wait a moment," his interest was instantly roused. As soon as the carriage stopped, the girl precipitated herself out of it, and rushed towards two ladies who were waiting. Mr. Markham Gaveston made no attempt to follow. He placed himself at the window of the carriage and looked out, his brown face wholly changed in aspect, his eyebrows contracted, his lips set firm. Two women, mother and daughter, one in full maturity, the other in

the sweetest bloom of youth, with their face turned towards a third person, who came slowly along leaning upon the arm of a young man. Dolly, rushing towards them, was received by the other girl with a hurried gesture of her hand, half salutation, half intended to draw the new-comer out of the way; while the elder lady took no notice, her face, which was full of anxiety, being turned towards the advancing group. All the people about followed more or less that anxious look, and the officials of the place were crowding round in respectful attendance. The spectator at the window, who had grown very pale through his brownness, saw an old man walking slowly and feebly along, leaning heavily upon his companion's arm. He seemed to say something as they made their way along, for the young man turned round and waved his disengaged hand to warn the bystanders away. The blood rushed into Gus Markham's ears, tingling and throbbing, as he saw this little procession pass, so close to where he sat at his window that he could have touched the chief figure. Sir William was ashy pale, his under lip drooped, one of his hands hung with a look of useless limpness by his side, he shuffled slightly with one foot. The air of

a man stricken and broken down as by some great blow was upon him. The spectator gazed with the strangest pang, eagerly, keenly at the face he had never consciously seen before. Not a doubt of who it was crossed his mind. He had expected to meet him coldly, perhaps to be received with doubt and antagonism; but it had never occurred to Gus's somewhat superficial but not unamiable spirit that anything tragical would be involved in the encounter. Gradually indeed, a sense of issues more serious than any that had ever occurred to him before had been invading the kindly self-satisfaction of his nature. Now he sat and gazed as under a spell. They had shown him Sir William's portrait at the Chase. Was it he that had made the difference between that self-possessed, dignified, imposing little statesman and this broken and suffering old man? Gus gazed as one who cannot detach his eyes. The whole scene passed before him like a picture. The beautiful, anxious woman, gazing with such circles of trouble round her eyes, watching every step her husband made; the beautiful girl, putting her young companion aside, watching her father creep along through the sunshine; the young man—but here Gus's

thoughts broke off short. Was that Paul? It did not seem to him like the idea of Paul which he had got from all that had been said. The young man was not like any of the others. He had none of that "family look" which distinguishes even in unlikeness members of the same race. His face was serious, but not anxious like the others; he had an air of kind solicitude, not of family trouble. Was it Paul? Was it Sir William's heir? They passed slowly before him, all the rest of the faces round looking after them, turned towards them, making them the centre, as this far more deeply interested spectator did.

He felt himself drawn after them, he could not tell how, and stole quite quietly out of the carriage as soon as they had passed. They were going further on to another train—a special one—which was going back to Markham Royal. Gus followed slowly among the other bystanders, walking as near the principal persons as he could, following as at a funeral. Was it his doing? Was it his fault? He heard the murmurs of the people with a strange sense of guiltiness. "He's aged ten years," he heard one say to another, "since the other day." "Ah, sons has a deal to answer for," said

another. This speech went buzzing through his mind like a winged and stinging insect It hurt him, though nobody could have thought of him in saying it. He saw the sick man put carefully into the carriage, watching every movement, and feeling as if he himself were hurt by the little stumble of his foot as he went in—the jar of unexpected motion in the train. Lady Markham passed him slowly, as he stood looking with a woful face, deadly serious and awe-stricken, after the sufferer, and gave him a grateful glance, seeing what she thought the sympathy in his eyes. But it was not sympathy; it was a far stronger, more personal feeling. He stood gazing while everything was arranged for Sir William's comfort, and started to hear his voice coming out of the midst of the anxious group. It was not much he said—nothing, indeed, but a "That will do—that will do!" half querulous, half grateful. But the sound gave the looker-on a shock; it sounded to him reproachful, almost terrible. He kept standing there, staring, seeing nothing except the man whom he had never seen before—whom, for all he knew—was it possible?—his letter had killed.

Then suddenly the sound of other voices came to his

ears—a whispering conversation. The two girls were behind him, not conscious of his presence.

"Very ill," one was saying. "Oh, Dolly, yesterday we thought he would have died. But he is so much better now. The doctor was quite perplexed; he said he never saw anything so momentary; he could not call it a fit—it lasted so short a time. He thinks in a day or two he will be quite well again."

"Alice!" said the other's whispering voice, "don't tell me if it vexes you; but I will never—never say a word. Oh, tell me! I can't think of anything else—was it Paul?"

"Paul!" with a tone of indignation. Then the voice softened. "Dolly, dear, I know why you ask. Paul has been—very—wilful: he has given us a great deal of grief. I don't know how to tell you. But it was not Paul. Oh, there have been so many things! and he had letters—that worried him."

"Was that all?"

She was standing close by the man into whose heart these words sank like a stone.

"Everybody," said Dolly, "is worried by letters; and now that he is safely here, you and your mamma

will be able to take care of him, and keep everything that is bad for him out of his way."

"I hope so," said Alice doubtfully. And then she passed Gus Markham so closely that her dress touched him. He withdrew from the touch hastily, and looked at her with anxious eyes. If she had known! but she did not look at him; far less had she any thought that he was involved in the catastrophe that had happened. He stood quite still, paying no attention to Dolly, watching them as Alice joined her mother in the carriage. Then he hurried on to another compartment and got in. What a home-coming it would be!—the children that had been so merry subdued and silenced at once—the big house that had looked so peaceful, filled full of apprehension and trouble. He got into one of the carriages that followed, with a sense that nothing could disassociate him henceforward from this troubled family.

Dolly, standing wistful on the platform to watch her friend go away, caught sight of him, too, as the train passed, and a gleam of wonder shot over her little pale face. Yes, they would all wonder, no doubt. It would seem strange—very strange to everybody. But it was clear that wherever this party went he must follow them. His lot was cast in with theirs, once for all.

CHAPTER XXI.

On the morning when Lady Markham went upon that unfortunate visit to Spears in his shop, which has been already recorded, both her husband and daughter were early astir—astir in that way which so often occurs in a family disturbed by domestic anxiety, when all are roused and in movement before the ordinary time, yet all unwilling to begin the day, to meet, to breakfast, to return once more to painful discussions of a trouble which no discussions ever diminish. Lady Markham stole out, thinking that both were asleep, while, on the other hand, both father and daughter respected her restlessness, and used what expedients were in their power to soothe their own.

Sir William had his writing-case, and the despatch-box which he carried everywhere with him, taken down

stairs, to the big, bare sitting-room, in which his wife and he had discussed Paul on the previous night—a high square room, like a box, as blank and featureless; and there sat down, and made a pretence of writing his letters,—nay, more than a pretence, for his mind was preternaturally clear, stirred into activity and wakefulness more strenuous even than its wont, by the care which was the undercurrent of all his thoughts, and perpetually present with him. He wrote several letters about business, public and private, in which his well-known terse and concentrated style was more concentrated and terse than ever. And by times he laid down his pen, and breathed a sigh out of the very depths of his chest, from the bottom of his heart. This was all the sign he gave of the distractions which were in his mind. It was much from him. He was not so overwhelmed as his wife by the suggestion of Paul's possible entanglement, but he was much more angry, annoyed, and impatient of the folly which all his wisdom could not cure. What can be more irritating, confusing, bewildering to a man who knows himself a power and influence in the world: not to be able to influence the being nearest to him to persuade his own son to hear

reason! There could not be a greater irony of fate. And behind this irritation and annoyance there was the other mystery, which only he knew of—the danger which menaced Paul in those prospects which Paul held so lightly, and was ready to throw away on the lightest inducement. Would he care as little for them if they were to disappear from him at the will of another, not his own? To find himself thus, between two impossibilities—between his young son whom he could no more move than he could move a mountain, and another unknown being who for aught he knew might be as little manageable as Paul, he was held fast and his mind driven to bay. He kept himself out of the whirl of thought and feeling which these perplexities raised by mere force of will, and sat perfectly self-controlled at the bare table writing his letters, himself as neat as usual, every fold of his trim attire in its right place, his tie tied with all the usual exactitude, his sentences more sharply cut, more tersely defined than ever. The suppressed excitement in him acted as a powerful stimulant, quickening his heart's action, and intensifying the clearness of his brain; but now and then he put down his pen, forgot the imperial problems which were

easier to solve than these private ones, and relieved his full heart with the labouring of a profound sigh; then set to work once more.

The breakfast was brought in before Lady Markham appeared. Alice had been up in her own room for, she thought, hours—trying to read, trying to find any little trivial occupation, wandering to the window to gaze out blindly, seeing nothing, fulfilling all the tricks of anxiety, as if she, happy child, had been born to it, or had lived in no other atmosphere all her days. And yet it was but a short time since the very *a, b, c,* of this devouring absorbing passion, had been unknown to her—so easily are all its habits learnt. She went down stairs when the hour for breakfast arrived, and found Sir William very busy over his papers.

"Where is your mother?" he said.

Alice did not know; but they easily concluded that being ready early she had gone—it was not far—to see her boy in his rooms, perhaps to use some argument with him which had been taught to her in the counsels of the night.

"She will have gone to bring Paul to breakfast," Alice said, feeling it was her business to smile, and keep

what show of liveliness was possible. Then she made the tea, and going to the window once more stood looking out, hearing in the silence the scratch of her father's pen upon the paper, and the bubbling and boiling of the urn upon the table.

By and by they sat down to breakfast. Lady Markham possibly was staying with Paul. Perhaps he was late, as usual, and kept her waiting. It seemed a cheerful token, a sign of good, to fall back upon Paul's lateness—that familiar home grievance which they all had laughed and scolded about a hundred times. To say that he was "late as usual," that mamma no doubt had found him in bed, and was waiting for him, lazy fellow, seemed to break the new and gloomy spell.

Just then, however, a step approached, and some one knocked; a servant, and after him, their friend of yesterday, young Fairfax, very shamefaced and blushing, who came to say that Lady Markham had sent him, that she was taking off her hat up stairs, and would be down directly; and that he was under her orders to wait here for something she wanted him to do.

Fairfax blushed to the roots of his hair, and was full of apologies.

"I am so sorry," he said, "to disturb you; but Lady Markham——"

"Bring another cup," said Sir William.

The waiter, who had ushered in Fairfax, had brought also a letter, which was almost more surprising than the other visitor.

Sir William, however, was glad of any one who took him out of himself. He looked at his letter, but it did not seem important. The postmark was Markham Royal. There was no one there to give him uneasiness of any kind. He took it up between his finger and thumb, as he said—"Bring another cup."

And then neither of the young people knew anything more about Sir William till Lady Markham came in. He retired behind his letter as behind a shield, and the others talked. Fairfax was somewhat shy. He described how he had met Lady Markham in the fresh morning.

"It is the most pleasant time for walking if people only knew."

"Did mamma go to see Paul? and oh, where is he? will not he come?" said Alice.

The tears got into her voice. Had things gone so far that he would refuse to come?

"I don't think she has seen Markham," said young Fairfax.

Lady Markham had brought him in with her that she might not be obliged all at once to explain where she had been. The same reason made her spend a longer time than was necessary in taking off her hat and putting on the matronly cap with which she covered her beautiful hair. She thought with the simple subtlety of an innocent woman that the conversation would be in full course when she made her appearance and any confusion on her own part be concealed. When she came in her manners were of the conciliatory and effusive kind which is common to all culprits desirous of avoiding explanations of equivocal conduct.

"I met Mr. Fairfax when I went out, and I met him again coming back," she said, "and he owned he had not breakfasted. I hope you are giving him something to eat, Alice."

Alice looked up anxiously in her mother's eyes. Where was Paul? that look inquired, but the glance with which Lady Markham replied conveyed no

information. She shrank from her child's look, and sitting down began to talk almost volubly.

"I went further than I meant to go; the morning was so lovely and everything so still. Is it usually so still, so vacant, in summer, Mr. Fairfax? In the country we are used to it—but to see a place usually so full of young life in this state of quiet is strange. I met—scarcely any one," said Lady Markham. "William, you will have some more tea?"

Sir William did not make any answer. The letter which he had been holding up dropped, or rather the hand which had held it dropped upon his knee; and he was leaning back in his chair, Lady Markham could see with the corner of her eye—but she did not look at him, not wishing to risk the encounter.

"I thought I should be back before you were ready," she said. "We are all early this morning. I suppose it is because an inn is so unlike home. William—Oh!" She rose to her feet in sudden alarm. "Are you ill? What is the matter?"

He was leaning back in his chair, his head drooping against it, his face very pale, his mouth open and his breath labouring and painful, but he had not lost

command of himself. When his wife rushed to him he tried to smile.

"Feeling—faint," he said, feebly.

It was a weakness to which he had been subject before. While they hurried to get wine, eau-de-Cologne, all the usual restoratives, he, still keeping up a vestige of a smile, did his best to fold up the letter he was holding, and groped about for the envelope.

"I will put it away," his wife said; but he made a slight negative movement of his head and succeeded in pushing it into a letter-case, which he always carried. The envelope had dropped on the floor. Who thought anything of it? He had things to move him quite sufficient to account for any disturbance of the heart without seeking for further causes. After a while the faintness passed off, his breathing improved, his heart began to beat naturally, and he came, or seemed to come, to himself. When he went up stairs with Lady Markham's anxious attendance, Alice and the young man remained alone. These few minutes had done as much as weeks generally do towards the growing acquaintance of these two young persons. Fairfax had run hither and thither to get whatever they wanted.

He had supported Sir William up stairs. He had shared in the alarm, the confusion, the trouble of the moment. Alice came down with him after her father had been established in his room, to think of the civilities which were due to a stranger. The half-eaten meal on the table, the confusion of chairs, the air of human trouble and agitation in the place had already made the bare room more like an inhabited house. Alice faintly begged her companion to take his place again.

"Mamma will come presently. He will want nothing but quiet and rest: he has been—worried—you know."

"Yes," said Fairfax; "it throws a light upon some things I never thought of before. My people are robust, fortunately; they are only uncles and aunts, who don't suffer in the same way as one's parents, I suppose. But, Miss Markham, if any one had cared as much for me—I have given a great deal more cause for anxiety than your brother has done. When I see how you are all upset it makes me blush for myself."

"Oh, Mr. Fairfax, it is so kind, so good of you to say so."

"Is it?" he said, with genuine surprise; "now I wonder why? There is no goodness about it, I fear, one way or the other. Only there are lots of us that don't realise—that can't understand."

Alice's heart grew quite light. She considered that this independent testimony was as good as a vindication of Paul. A young man, a comrade, must know all about him, that was self-evident; and when he declared so distinctly Paul's superiority to himself what doubt could there be that such an uncalled, generous witness must be trustworthy? She could have laughed, or cried for pleasure.

"I should like mamma to hear you," she said. "I suppose it is because he is so much to us all that we are so foolish. You don't think he will really go away? That is what worries papa. He wants him to go into parliament, and public life."

Fairfax laughed.

"He is a lucky fellow. It is not possible to imagine that he could willingly throw away all these chances; but if I can answer for Markham's heart I can't answer for his head, Miss Markham. The one is as right as a compass, but the other is packed full of crotchets I must

allow; and what he may be able to do in that way, how far he may go, I would not undertake to say."

Alice's countenance fell, then brightened faintly again with a little light of opposition.

"You may call them crotchets, Mr. Fairfax, but I am sure Paul's ideas are convictions, and what can he do but follow them out?"

"Ah, that is giving up the question," said the other. "I believe they are convictions; but you may be convinced of a foolish thing as well as a wise one."

"What he says is not foolish. I do not agree with it," said Alice, "but it is fine, it is noble; he would do what our Lord says, give up everything for the poor."

Fairfax shook his head.

"It sounds very fine in that way, Miss Markham; but that is not how Paul puts it. It is not giving to the poor, but sharing with his equals that is his thought, and I do not think you would like that. If they all had their share to-morrow, half would have two shares next day—at least so everybody says," he went on with a laugh —"all the philosophers; and I am sure Paul would have no share at all. He would have given it away to somebody who persuaded him that he had not drawn a good

lot. 'Take it,' he would say, 'I can starve better than you can,' for he is a fine aristocrat, our friend Paul."

"Do you call that being an aristocrat?"

"To be sure; isn't it? A poor little *roturier* like myself has not the knack of it. I should say, 'Take a cut at mine,' as if it was an orange, and hack at it myself among the rest. But Markham does things with a grand air. He will always have it; indeed, I think that when he had got his share to which he would allow he had an indisputable right, he would prefer to give it away in a lordly manner, and keep nothing but his magnanimity. That is what he is doing now."

To have such an audience as Alice, with that glow of tender gratitude and pleasure in her eyes, looking up to him, fixed upon his face, her smile following every word of this pretended impartial and philosophical description, was worth any man's while. He was tempted to go on romancing about Paul, giving him not only the praise he felt his due, but a great deal more, in order to secure a little longer that rapt attention. But perhaps it was better to stop, and leave her time enough to say with her hands clasped, and her whole soul in her look—

"Mr. Fairfax, you make me very happy. They have

whispered things to mamma which have made her wretched; but it is 'nothing but his magnanimity:' that was what you said?"

Lady Markham opened the door, and came into the room before Fairfax could reply. She was preoccupied, and took no notice of the conversation that was going on.

"Your father has fallen asleep," she said; "he is very much exhausted. Oh, how I wish we had not left home." Then she perceived Fairfax, and added with a change of tone, "You have had no breakfast. Alice, I thought you would attend to Mr. Fairfax."

"Oh!" cried Alice, "do you think he cares about breakfast when we are in such trouble? He has been telling me about Paul. Mamma, listen to him. He must know. He says it is all Paul's magnanimity—that was the word."

"Oh, my dear, my dear," cried Lady Markham, "it is my fault. I have made everything worse. Oh! why will women interfere? We ought to have stayed at home, and had patience. What can we do one way or another? I have behaved like a fool and got my boy into more trouble. And now your father. What shall we do if he is ill too?"

"Mamma, it is impossible that you can be to blame."

"Quite impossible!" cried Fairfax. What gave him any right to speak? Yet they took it as a matter of course. "And pardon me, Lady Markham, I do not think there is any one much to blame. There is no harm in it at all. If you could but see behind the scenes as I do! Spears is an enthusiast—say a fanatic; he believes all he says, and Paul believes him and thinks he thinks with him; but he does not altogether; and they will differ more and more as time goes on. Patience, and it will come right."

"Ah, if I could have had patience! Do you know what anxiety means?" said Lady Markham. "It is a determination not to be unhappy. What does it matter whether I am happy or not—I have been very happy all my life. I ought to bear it, and wait till God sends a cure; but we would not, Alice—we would rush into it, knowing nothing, meddling. Oh, why should women interfere!"

This strained Alice's sense of natural justice.

"Have not women as much to do with it as men?" she said.

Lady Markham shook her head.

"I have made things worse—I have made everything worse. Mr. Fairfax, will you go and tell Paul that his father is ill? Oh no, I have no right to ask you to take so much trouble; but you are kind, I know. You have a mother who would go out of her senses too, if anything was amiss. When you tell her she will explain it all to you; how foolish, how foolish a woman can be. Go and tell him that his father is ill. His father is not a man to be ill for nothing. He will see it is no light matter when he knows that his father is ill. There is something—a little—the matter with Sir William's heart—not much, thank God; but we ought to spare him. Will you tell Paul?—but Alice, Alice, how could you be so careless, Mr. Fairfax has had no breakfast!"

Lady Markham rose hastily, and drew a chair to the table, and turned to him, pointing to it, with a tremulous smile about her mouth, though the tears were standing in her eyes.

Was it possible that it was only yesterday he had come to know them? He hurried out with his message, quite agitated by the sight of this family trouble. It was no affair of his, and he had no mother as Lady Markham suggested, to make him understand; but his

heart seemed to be suddenly filled up like an empty vessel with these new people's affairs. He tried to laugh at himself, but stopped in the midst of the effort, growing portentously grave. Why should he laugh? If Sir William was ill, and Paul on the point of abandoning his natural position and his native country on a wild-goose chase, with which in all probability he would soon be utterly disgusted, circumstances were very grave for the Markham family. Perhaps Fairfax felt it all the more strongly that he in his own person had no family to abandon. He felt the want so much that he wondered all the more at one who, with all these pleasant things belonging to him, should be willing to throw up everything, and go off into the wilds with Spears—with Spears! he repeated to himself with indignant, yet half-amused surprise. He did not know anything about Janet, for the very good reason that till this morning there had been nothing to know.

Fairfax walked very rapidly to Paul's college, but did not find him. As he however came slowly back again across the deserted quadrangle, he met young Markham coming gloomily along, his head down, and his countenance obscured. There was a sort of dull decision in

Paul's aspect, as if all his affairs had been settled at a stroke, as if the hopes and uncertainties of ordinary life were over for him. He who held his head so high, whose step was so light and elastic with all the rapidity of a visionary, came along now crushing the grass with a heavy foot, all the lightness and youthfulness gone out of him. Fairfax looked at him with an impulse of wonder. This favourite of fortune, so much beloved, important to so many, with the world at his feet, what could have put so much perverseness into his mind that he, of all men in the world, should be discontented with his lot! How wonderful it was! Paul did not want to be accosted, to be disturbed in his gloomy thoughts by any frivolous interruption. He was about to pass with a sullen nod when Fairfax stopped him against his will.

"Markham, I am sent to tell you that your father is ill."

Paul stopped, and regarded him with sudden anger.

"What the devil," he said, with altogether uncalled-for indignation, "have you to do with my affairs?"

"Nothing in the world; but your father has been taken ill at the hotel," said Fairfax. His cheek flushed, too, but he subdued himself. "Lady Markham sent me

to tell you. I have nothing to do with it," he said; then went on, while the other stood and glared at him. Fairfax felt the blood boiling in his veins; but to quarrel with the undutiful son was not in his *consigne*. A man with three such people hanging (it seemed) their happiness on his wayward conclusions: his father ill, his mother with those beautiful eyes all strained with anxiety; his sister—Fairfax's eyes grew dim, as with a dazzlement of light, as he seemed to see before him Alice, with her head raised, her hands clasped, her blue eyes full of emotion—all for Paul. Good heavens! who dared speak of equality? This fellow, who was ready to share everything with his neighbours—how insensible he was to all those happinesses which he could not share.

CHAPTER VII.

PAUL did not at first obey the call thus sent to him. He lingered, angry that his friend should interfere as he said. He knew it was not interference, but the pride which was so strong in him, notwithstanding all his theories, resented haughtily the intrusion of a stranger into his family. Paul's theory was far from being complete. He was ready himself to abandon all he possessed, and to assert it as a necessity that every honest man should do the like, receive his share and nothing more; but he did not contemplate the idea of a general descent of his family into the wider ranks of common brotherhood. That his father should share his ideas, and resign his wealth and position, was a thing incredible he well knew; and curiously enough he had never thought of it. Whatever happened in the way of levelling, it had never

seriously occurred to him to think that the Markhams would be as the Spears, as the grocers or the hatters. (Grocers and hatters by the way are always excluded in visionary schemes of revolution. One must draw a line somewhere; and both the rich and poor draw it at the shopkeeper.) Such a thing could not be; it was impossible. Were there a republic proclaimed in England to-morrow, was there a general confiscation and redistribution of everything, making all men the same, the Markhams could not be as the Spears. It was not possible.

But still more hotly, as in the presence of real danger, Paul's pride stood up against the possibility of the Markhams being as the Fairfaxes.

Richard Fairfax was his friend; he was a gentleman—yes, no doubt, in himself a gentleman—but not as the Markhams were gentlemen. He was a nobody; he was the son of a nobody. He did not belong to the Fairfaxes of the north or of the south. He had a good name, but no more. What had such a fellow to do in Alice Markham's company? Spears at the Chase was an eccentricity of his own, which made Paul feel himself above prejudice, and nobly superior to the conventional

maxims of society; but Fairfax there affronted his pride. The two things were quite different. The same rules did not seem to apply to the noble working man, who was above them, as to the gentleman who was only a gentleman in his own right. That his mother should have formed a kind of alliance with this young man (though his own friend) irritated him beyond measure. Women were so easily taken in. Good manners, and a look of good breeding—so easily acquired nowadays when everybody is formed in the same mould, and all kinds of people can achieve the hall-mark of public schools and universities,—was enough to take in a woman. Had Paul been consulted, no such person should have entered the sacred precincts.

Yet Paul was a democrat, on the verge of surrendering everything, and throwing in his fortunes with a little communistic party! The inconsistency did not strike him, or if it ever stole across his mind, he repelled the consciousness with a hot protestation within himself that it was not at all the same thing. That Spears should be his equal was a thing to fight for, a thing that could never derange the inborn sense of aristocracy; but that Fairfax, who was so near his equal, should be his equal

—therein lies the danger, which instinct seizes upon, which rouses pride in arms.

This proud distaste and discontent occupied his mind at first to the exclusion of every other feeling. And when that faded, it may be allowed that Paul had some cause for a disinclination to see his mother. What had she done? She had dragged down upon his head the humble roof under which he had intended to find shelter. She had thrown him into the arms of those with whom indeed he was eager to consort, but whose embrace was no way attractive—nay, was repulsive to him. She had changed all his circumstances, vulgarised his plans, degraded him from the rank of a political apostle into that of a wretched besotted lover. Young men who are not in love, and in whom the intellect predominates, are apt to be very hard upon what they consider the delusion, the incredible folly of such a passion. To sacrifice freedom, personal independence, the unencumbered lightness of manhood, for the sake of a woman, seems to them the most ridiculous of mockeries until the moment comes when they share it. This was Paul's way of thinking. It was an outrage to his nature and mental powers to make him appear to

be doing that for Janet Spears which he was doing from the highest principle. And this was what his mother, with her womanish interpretation of his high aims and wishes, had made appear. He could not forgive her; and in this he was not without reason. He made many efforts before he could think with patience of the strange morning's work which had changed everything for him. No, he could not go to her so soon. He went to his rooms and shut himself in, sitting down among his books like any Roman among any ruins. Read! why should he read? These were useless tools of an old world, which he was about throwing off. "Honours!" what were they to him? The schools and the struggle had retreated into dim distance. A degree would be of far less consequence to him than a gun, and all his studies not worth half so much as the simplest lesson of his country breeding. To sit there, however, among all those relics of a time which was over, which had no more hold upon him, was gloomy work. And every refuge seemed taken from him. He did not want to go to the rooms of any other "man" where he might meet Fairfax. He could not go back to Spears; his heart revolted at the thought of going (as habit made him call

the place where his parents were) home. He was walking about in this gloomy way, now gazing out of one window, now out of another, when a little tap came to his door, a light foot, a soft voice, and agitated face.

"Oh, Paul, may I come in?" Alice said. "Have you not seen Mr. Fairfax? He was to tell you papa was ill. We want you—oh, we want you, Paul."

"What has Fairfax got to do with it?" growled Paul.

"Mr. Fairfax! Oh, nothing, but that he was so kind; he helped papa up stairs. He came for you when mamma sent him. I do not know what we should have done without him; for—*you* were not there, Paul!"

"Not much wonder if I was not there!"

"Why? Mamma does nothing but blame herself. She cries and says we should not have come. Oh, Paul! and papa, I told you, has had one of his faints. Will you come?" cried Alice, moved to tears, yet flushing high with a generous impatience; "or are we to be left to shift for ourselves?"

"She deserves it," he said. "What had she to do with it? Surely I am old enough to manage my own affairs."

"Is it *mamma* you mean by she? Then stay—or go where you like. Oh, how dare you!" cried Alice, wildly angry. "*Mamma!*" This stung her so that she went to the door hurriedly, going away; but that little flash of wrath was soon over. She stopped and turned round upon him, making another appeal. "You don't deserve that we should care for you; but we do care for you," she said. "Oh, Paul! when I tell you papa has had one of his faints—for what? because to think of you going away, forsaking us, giving up home, and your own place, and the people that you ought to care for, was more than he could bear. Paul! how can you leave us—leave Markham and everything you were once fond of—leave your duty, and the place you were born to?"

"My dear little Alice," he said, with a smile, glad to conceal a little melting of his own heart which was beyond his power of resisting, by this fine superiority, "speak of things you understand."

Then Alice flashed upon him with all the visionary vehemence of a girl in her own defence.

"How should I not understand?" she cried, "Am I so stupid? It is you who make yourself little, pretending to despise us girls. What is there to despise

in us? We do not fill our head with pride and fancies like you. We love those who belong to us, and serve them, and do our duty as we know how. It is not we who leave our old father to suffer, or tear our mother's heart in two. It is not we that turn peace into trouble. There you stand," cried Alice, "a man! fit to be in parliament making the laws better—fit to be doing something for them that belong to you, after learning, learning all your life, doing nothing but learn, that you might be good for something. And now, all you think you are good for is to emigrate, like the poor Irish. Is that all you are good for? Then you ought to be humble, and not dare to turn round and sneer and tell us to speak of things we understand. Understand! I understand that if you can do nothing better than that —if, after all, you can only betray us and forsake us, and be no use, no help to any one, it is a shame!"

Who can doubt that Alice's eloquence was broken with sobs, and her fury all blind with tears? She would not, however, for pride, let him see them fall, but turned away from the door with passionate haste, and flew down the deserted staircase, swallowing her sobs as best she could, and dashing away the hasty torrent from

her eyes. She heard him laugh as she got out into the air in all her agitation, and this sound stung Alice to the heart.

But if she had known it, Paul's laugh was like the ploughboy's whistle to keep his courage up. He had not expected any such onslaught, and he was not insensible to it, any more than she was to his scorn. For, after all, he did not in the least despise his sister, though it was so handy to pretend to do so. When he was left again among his ruins, though he stimulated himself, as by a sickly trumpet note of pretended victory by that laugh, Paul did not feel half so grand a personage as he could have wished, and for the next half hour or so there came and stabbed at him a little array of by no means pleasant thoughts.

In the afternoon, after some hours had elapsed, Paul walked into his father's room with a little air of defiance, and without any apologies. Sir William was seated in an easy chair, looking aged and worn.

"I am very sorry to hear that you have been ill, sir," his son said.

"Yes, I have been ill," said Sir William, "but it will pass off. I think the best thing for me is to get home."

"I should not think you could be very comfortable here," Paul said.

His mother was in the room, and his grievance against her rose up bitterly, and quenched the softer feeling which had moved him at sight of his father's pale face.

"It would perhaps have been better that we had not come. There are many things—that I must see after—in your interests. Paul, do you mean to come home with us? Whatever you may do hereafter, it would be best for you to come home now."

There was a momentary pause.

Sir William put forward no arguments, not even that of his own condition—and used no reproaches. But behind him appeared Lady Markham's face, pale and pathetic with entreaty. Her eyes were fixed upon her son with a look which he could scarcely withstand. And therefore Paul set his face like a rock, and would not yield.

"I don't see what good it would do, sir," he said. "You know my unalterable resolution. You know my principles, which are so much at variance with yours, and would prevent me from ever taking the position

you wish. Why should we worry each other since we can't agree? Besides, other circumstances have arisen," he said, with a vengeful glance at his mother. "But before I sail I shall certainly come to say good-bye."

His mother's faint call after him, "Paul! Paul!" which sounded like a cry of despair, caught at his very heart, but did not bring him back. His feet felt like lead as he went down the stairs. Almost they would not carry him from everything that was in reality most dear to him; but the more nature held him back the more determined was his obstinate will to go. He would come back to say good-bye before he sailed. Was he leaving himself a place of repentance? But at present, though he was wretched, though his heart seemed to have an arrow through it, and his feet were like lead, he would not stay.

This was how it came about that Sir William appeared at Birtwood station, leaning upon the arm of a young man who was not his son. After Paul's visit he had another attack of faintness; and Fairfax, who came back in the evening to put himself at the disposal of the ladies, found them in great agitation, eager to get home

again, yet half afraid to venture on the journey. He came back in the morning to help them to get their patient to the railway; and when they got there, Sir William, feeling the advantage of his arm, so held by him, that without either invitation or preparation, the young man, so strangely united to these strangers came with them, not a word being said on the subject. He had not even a ticket, nor the smallest provision for a visit. What of that? The young fellow was of that light heart and easy temper to which no adventure comes wrong.

CHAPTER VIII.

PAUL MARKHAM went back to his rooms, and sat down again amid the ruins. His heart was as heavy in his bosom as a lump of lead. It weighed upon him, hindered his breathing, refused to rise or to beat more lightly, let him do what he would. He had taken down his pictures, his china, all that he had thought luxurious, from his walls long before. Nothing remained of all his decorations which he had once loved but a copy of Albert Dürer's *Melancholia*, which he had kept, thinking it symbolical. Besides, it was only a photograph. Had it been an original print, worth a great deal more than its weight in gold, he would not have thought himself at liberty to keep it. He looked round upon his books with gloomy eyes. Ruins—nothing but ruins—all around him! What was the

good of them? They had done him all the service they were capable of, and in his life there was no further place for them. No schools now for him, no honours, no need of endless philosophical hair-splitting, this one's theory of being, that one's of knowing. He was going to put all that babble away. There were a few that he might take with him. Theocritus his *Idylls;* grey old Hesiod, that antique husbandman; Plato in his *Republic.* But even Plato, what was the good of him, with all his costly paraphernalia of a new society? Spears would do it all with much less trouble. No long education would be wanted for *his* rulers—if, indeed, any rulers should be needed. Less trouble! After all, when he came to think of it, it was by no means sure that Spears's process was less painful, less costly than Plato's. Himself, for example. Would every pioneer who joined their ranks, every leader among them, be obliged to pay his footing as dearly as Paul had done? To turn his back upon his father and mother, to cast all his antecedents to the winds, everything, from filial affection to the books upon his shelves —it could not be said that this was a cheap or easy probation.

He sat thus for he did not know how long, the sunshine of the August afternoon getting round the corner and streaming straight in, inquisitive and troublesome. What were they doing now at the inn? Sir William had been very gentle; he had not said a word of blame. His tone, his looks, his very weakness had been conciliatory. Paul, when he covered his eyes with his hands, seemed to see that scene again, and twinges came to his heart, sudden impulses to get up and go to them—to go at least to the place and ask after his father. There are temptations to do right as well as to do wrong. Impulses came to him like little good angels pulling at his sleeve, entreating him to come; but alas! it is always more easy to resist temptations to do well than to do ill. Once or twice he was so far moved that he got up from his chair; but always sat down again after a blank look from the window over the deserted quadrangle and the parched trees. Why should he go? It would but raise vain hopes in them that he meant to yield: and he did not mean to yield. This kept him a prisoner in his room; for if he did not go *there,* where should he go? He paid no attention to the hour of dinner. He could not, he felt, have gone

to Hall where there was the little dinner for the scanty summer contingent, the "men" who were "staying up to read." Even these heroes were dropping away daily, and at the best of times the little group in a place which held so many was depressing; and Paul did not want to dine—the common offices of life were disgusting and distasteful to him. He roused himself to go out at last when the daylight had begun to wane. There was to be a meeting that night in the shop of Spears, of the people who were going with them to found the new colony—for to this their plan of emigration had grown; but it was still too early for that. The shadows were lengthening, the light almost level, when Paul came out. He did not know where to go; he wandered through the streets where the townspeople were all about enjoying the beautiful evening, and strolled heedlessly, not caring where he went, towards the inn. He could not get out of his mind the recollection of the little party who would get no good of the beautiful evening. His mother and Alice, like most mothers and sisters, had always imagined themselves to be "very fond of Oxford." They had liked to hear of all its habits, and foolish, youthful ways—the

nightly flights from the proctors, the corners where some hairbreadth 'scape had been made, the "High" and the "Broad," and all that innocent slang which a happy boy pours forth on his first introduction to these delights. It had always been an excitement, a delight to them to come here. Now he could not but think of them shut up in that bare, gloomy room, with the high, pale walls, and long green curtains. Oh, how they plucked at his sleeve and at his heart, those persuading angels! How he was tempted to go back again to bid bygones be bygones, to forgive everything (this was his way of putting it)! But, no. Had it been the other kind of angel leading him to another kind of presence, most likely the young man would not have stood out half so bravely. He strolled down to the river where one or two melancholy "men" in boats were keeping themselves as retired as possible from the splashing of the released shopboys, and the still more uncomfortable vicinity of the town boats, which were rowed almost as well as the 'Varsity. The sky was all rosy with sunset, glowing over the long reflections in the water, touching the greenness of the banks and trees into a fuller tint, and making more blue, with all those contrasting tints

of rose, the blueness of the sky. The soft summer evening, with a gentle exhaustion in it—sweet langour, yet relief after the heat and work of the day—the soft plash of the oars, the voices all harmonised by the warm air, the movement and simple enjoyment about, were all like so many reproaches to him. How they would have liked to walk with him, to laugh softly back to every sound of pleasure, to talk of everything. Paul said to himself that all that was over. It was a pity for Alice to be shut up in a dingy room, but to-morrow she would be at home among their own woods, and what would it matter? As for himself, it must be his henceforward to tread the stern path of a higher duty—alone.

Paul met with one or two interruptions on the way. He saw Fairfax at a distance, and saw that he avoided him, turning quickly away; and he met one or two others of those who were "staying up to read." Finally he met a being of a different order, less easy to separate himself from, a young Don, who turned and walked with him, anxiously intimating that it was quite immaterial which way he went,—a young man, not much older than Paul himself, but cultivated to the very

finger-tips, and anxious to exercise a good influence if that might prove possible. This new companion gave him a stab unawares by asking if it was true what he had heard, that Sir William Markham was ill? Even in a deserted college in the midst of the long vacation, when there happens to be a tragic chapter of life going on, some echo of it will get abroad. The young Don was very modest, and anxious not to offend or intrude upon any "man" in trouble; but yet he would have been glad could he have exercised a good influence. They walked along the river bank while the sunset faded out of the west, and Paul at last acknowledged the relief of companionship by plunging forth into a statement of his own intentions which filled his auditor with horror and dismay. A man who did not intend to take his degree was as a lost soul to the young Don. But even in these appalling circumstances he could not be impolite. He listened with gentle disapproval and regret, shaking his head now and then, yet saying softly, "I see what you mean," when Paul poured forth a passionate statement of his difficulties, his sense of the injustice of his own position, his horror at the corruption and falsehood of the world, and determination never to

sanction, never to accept in his own person the cruel advantages to which he had been born. After all that had come and gone it was a great ease to the young revolutionary, upon such a verge of high devotion yet despair as he was, to make one impassioned assertion of his principles, the higher rule of his conduct. Probably the college, too, and all the men would hear that it was for the love of Spears's daughter that he was throwing his life away. He was glad (when he came to think of it) of this chance of setting himself right. "I see what you mean," said the young Don. He would have said the same thing with the same regretful air, non-argumentative and sympathetic, yet with his own opinion in the background, had Paul poured into his ear a confession of passionate attachment for Janet Spears. He understood what political enthusiasm was, and he knew that the world might be well lost for love, though he did not approve either of these passions. In either case he would have been very glad to have established a good influence over the man thus carried away, whether by the head or the heart. Paul, however, if he did not come under any good influence, was solaced by his own outburst. He got cooler as they turned back

towards the towers now rising dimly into the cooled and softened atmosphere of the night, and the glimmer of the friendly lights.

It was a disappointment to the young Don when his companion left him abruptly, long before they reached their college. He had meant to be very kind to him at this violent crisis of life, and who could tell, perhaps to win him back to safer views—at least to put before him so forcibly the absolute necessity of taking his degree that passion itself would be forced to pause. But Paul did not give him this chance. He said a hurried good-night when they reached the spot at which he had met his mother in the morning, the point at which the picturesque and graceful old street was crossed by the line of uneven thoroughfares, in which Spears's house lay. The young Don looked after him in surprise and disappointment as he walked away. He shook his head. He would not doubt the authenticity of Paul's confession of faith, but the low street breathed out of it a chill of suspicion. He could understand anything that was theoretical however wrong-headed, but Spears's shop and the street in which it stood was a great deal more difficult to understand.

Paul sped along, relieved of the immediate pressure on his heart, and more determined than ever in his resolution. He had said little in the morning in answer to Spears's question. He had declared that it was not love alone which had brought him there; that there had been nothing feigned in his enthusiasm for that teaching in which the salvation of the world he believed would be found to lie; but further he had said nothing. And Spears had been too much relieved on his own account and was too delicate on his child's, to pursue the subject. To tell the truth, the demagogue, though the kindest of fathers, had not been delighted by the thought that his own favourite disciple, his captive aristocrat, the young hero whom he had won out of the enemy's ranks, and who was his pride, had been all the time only his daughter's lover. The thought had hurt and humbled him. That Paul might love Janet in the second place, might have learned to love her after his introduction to the shop, was a different matter. The gratification of recovering his own place and influence drove the other question from his mind; and by the time it recurred to him, the delicacy of a mind full of natural refinement had resumed its

sway. It was for the lover to open this subject, not the girl or her friends. And though he wondered a little that Paul said nothing more to him, he asked no further question. It was a relief to Paul, on the other hand, not to be called to account. The evil day was deferred at least, if no more, and he was very glad to put it off, to wait for what might happen, to hope perhaps that after all nothing would happen. Paul did not know what had passed or what his mother had said. Her own broken and tremulous confession of wrong, and Janet's consciousness, had been his only guides. He had thought himself for the moment bound to Janet; but perhaps things had not gone so far as he thought; and though he was determined to hold firmly to any bond of honour that might hold him, even though it were not of his own making, yet the sense that his freedom was still intact was an unspeakable relief to him. Since then he had managed to forget Janet; but when he turned his face towards her home it was not so easy to continue to forget. The twilight was brightened by the twinkle of the lamps all the way down the vista of the street, and by a dimmer light here and there from a window. The shutters had been

put up in Spears's shop, but the door was open, and in the doorway, faintly indicated by the light behind, stood some one looking out. Paul knew, before he could see, who it was. She was looking out for him. It is hard to find our arrival uncared for by those whom we want to see, but it is, if not more hard, at least far more embarrassing, to find ourselves eagerly looked for by those whom we have no wish to see. Paul's heart sank when he saw the girl, with the long lines of her black gown filling the doorway, leaning out her graceful shoulders and fair head in an attitude of anxious expectation looking for him. What could he say to her? The return of her image thus suddenly thrust before him filled him with impatience and annoyance. Yet he could not withdraw himself; he went on without a pause, wondering with a troubled mind how far his mother had committed him, what she expected; what she wanted, this girl who was no heroine, no ideal woman, but only Janet Spears.

Her eyes drooped as he came forward, with a shyness which had in it something of finer feeling than Janet had yet known. He was very dazzling to her in the light of his social superiority. A gentleman! Janet

had heard all her life that a gentleman was the work of nature, not of circumstance, that those who arrogated the title to themselves had often far less right to bear it than the working men whom they scorned; but all these theories had passed lightly over her. *She* knew the difference. They might talk what stuff they liked, but that would not make one of them a *Sir*—a man whose wife would be "my Lady," a dazzling personage who drove in his carriage, who had horses to ride, and men in livery to walk behind him. The other was all talk! fudge! rubbish! but these things were realities. She watched him coming down the street in the grey twilight, in the faint yellow of the lamps. His very walk was different, the way in which he held his arms, not to speak of his clothes, of which even the Sunday clothes of the others bore but the faintest resemblance. Janet's nature, such as it was, prostrated itself before the finest thing, the highest thing she knew. And if this is noble in other matters, why not in the most important of all? If it is a sign of an elevated soul to seek the best and loftiest, why not in a husband? Janet did not stand upon logic, yet her logic here was far better practically than her father's.

She recognised Paul without a moment's hesitation as the best thing within her reach, and why should not she put forth her entire powers to gain the perfection she sought?

"They have not come yet, Mr.—Paul," said Janet, casting down her eyes.

She had always called him Mr. Markham before; but she could not help hoping that now he would tenderly reprove her for the previous title, and bid her call him by his Christian name. Was not this the first step in lovers' intimacy? But this was not what happened. It struck Paul disagreeably to hear his name at all, even with the Mr. before it. His mind rebelled at this half appropriation of him. He could not help feeling that it was cowardly of him to be rough with Janet, who had no power of defending herself; but he could not help it. He brushed past her with a half-sensation of disgust.

"Haven't they?" he said; "never mind. I dare say your father is in."

"Father is not in, Mr. Paul. He's gone to tell Fraser, the Scotchman, to come. He didn't know there was a meeting. I am the only one that is in to keep the

house. The girls have gone to the circus—did you know there was a circus?—but I," said Janet, "I don't care for such things. I've stayed at home."

Then there was a pause. Paul had gone into the shop, which was swept, and arranged with benches, and a table in the middle, for the emigrants' meeting, and Janet following him so far as to stand in the inner instead of the outer doorway, stood gazing at him by the imperfect light of the lamp. How could she help gazing at him? She expected him to say something. This was not how he had looked at her in the morning. Poor Janet was disappointed to the bottom of her heart.

"That's a pity," said Paul, brusquely. "If I had known Spears would not be here I should not have come so soon. I don't see why he should keep me waiting for him. I have a thousand things to do; all my time is taken up. I might have been with my father, who is ill, if I had not come here."

"Oh, is he ill?" said Janet. Her eyes grew bigger in the dim light gazing at him. "It must be very strange to be a gentleman's son like that," she added softly; "and to think what a difference it might make

all at once if—— And you never can tell what may happen," she concluded with a sigh of excitement. "I don't wonder you're in a way."

"Am I in a way? I don't think so," said Paul. "I hope there is nothing much the matter with my father," he added, after a little pause.

"Oh!" said Janet, disappointed; but she added "There will be some time. Some time or other you will be a great man, with a title and all that property. Oh, I wanted to say one thing to you before those men come. What in the world have you to do with *them*, Mr. Paul? They may think themselves ill-used, but you can't think yourself ill-used. Why should you go away when you have everything, everything you can set your face to, at home? Plenty of money, and a grand house, and horses and carriages, and all sorts of things. You can understand folks doing it that have nothing; but a gentleman like you that only need to wish and have, whatever can *you* want to emigrate for?" Janet cried.

CHAPTER IX.

SPEARS entered the shop suddenly, before Janet had quite ended her astonishing address. If his dog had offered him advice Paul could scarcely have been more surprised. He was standing at one end of the shop gazing at her, his eyes wide opened with surprise, and consternation in his mind, when her father came in. Spears was not so much astonished as Paul was. He saw his daughter standing in the doorway, her colourless face a little flushed by her earnestness, and gaining much in beauty from that heightened tint, and from the meaning in it. Spears thought within himself that it was true what all the romancers said, that there was nothing like love for embellishing a woman, and that his Janet had never looked so handsome before. But that was all. He had come in by a back way, bringing with him

the Scotchman, Fraser, who was to be one of the colonists, and therefore could not make any remark upon the conjunction of these two, or upon the few words he heard her saying. What so natural as that she should be found lingering about the place where Paul was expected, or that he should take her opinion, however foolish it might be?

"Come, you two," Spears said, good-humouredly, "no more of this—there is a time for everything;" and Janet, with a start, with one anxious look at Paul to see what effect her eloquence was having, went slowly away.

Paul had been profoundly astonished by what she said. He could not understand it. *She* to bid him remain at home!—she to ask him with fervour, and almost indignation, what he wanted to emigrate for!—she, her father's daughter, to remind him of those advantages which her father denounced! Paul felt himself utterly bewildered by what she said. There was nothing in him which helped him to an understanding of Janet's real meaning. That her severely practical mind regarded her father's creed as simple folly and big words might have been made credible to him: but that Janet

had a distinct determination, rapidly formed, but of the most absolute force, not to permit himself—him—Paul —to give up any advantages which she had the hope of sharing—that she was determined to taste the sweets which he had set his foolish heart on throwing away—no idea of this entered into his mind. Her warning look —the little gesture of leave-taking which she made as she went away, and into which she managed to convey the same warning—overwhelmed him with amazement. What did she mean? He might have thought there was some secret plan against him from which she meant to defend him, if he had not had absolute confidence in Spears. Was it an effort of generosity on her part to free him from the dilemma in which his mother's indiscretion had placed him—to put him away from the place in which her company might be a danger to him—to restore him to the sphere to which he belonged? For the first time with this idea a warm impulse of gratitude and admiration moved him towards the demagogue's daughter. He waved his hand to her as she went away, with a smile which made Janet's heart jump, and in which indeed no great strain of imagination was required to see a lover's lingering of delight and

regret as the object of his affection left him. Spears laughed; he saw no deficiency.

"Come, come," he said, "we have more serious work in hand. Leave all that to a seasonable moment." And upon the man's face there came a smile—soft, luminous, full of tender sympathy. In his day he too had known what love was.

Fraser was an uncouth, thick man, short of stature, with that obscuration of griminess about him which sometimes appears in the general aspect of a labouring man. He was not dirty, but he was indistinct, as seen through a certain haze of atmosphere, which, however, from his side was penetrated by two keen eyes. He gave Paul a quick look, then, with a word of salutation, took his seat at the table, on which a paraffin lamp, emitting no delightful odour, was standing. As he did so two others came in. One a lean man, with spindle limbs and a long pale face, who looked as if he had grown into exaggerated pale length, like some imprisoned plant struggling upwards to the distant light. The other was a clerk, in the decent, carefully arranged dress which distinguishes his class, very neat and respectable, and "like a gentleman," though a world

apart from a gentleman's ease of costume. The tall man was Weaver; the clerk's name was Short. They took their seats also with brief salutations. There was room around the table for several more, but these seemed all that were coming. Spears took his place at the head. He was by far the most living and life-like of the party.

"Are we all here?" he said. "There are some vacant places. I hope that doesn't mean falling away. Where is Rees, Short? What has become of him? It was you that brought him here."

"He has heard of another situation," said the clerk. "His wife never liked it. I doubt much whether we'll see him again. He never was a man to be calculated upon. Hot at first—very hot—but no stamina. I warned you, Spears."

"And Layton—he was hot too—has he dropped off as well?"

"Well, you see, Spears," said the long man, with laboured utterance, working his hand slowly up and down, "work's mended in our trade; there's a deal in that. When it's bad a man's ready for anything; as it was all the early summer—not a thing doing.

There were dozens on us as would have gone anywhere to make sure of a bit o' bread. But work's mended, and most of us think no more on what we've said. Not me," the speaker added; "I'm staunch. It's nothing to me what the women say."

"I suppose you have got the maps and all the details?" said the clerk. "If we're going out in October, we'd better settle all the details without delay."

Then there arose a discussion about the land that was offered by the emigration commissioners, which it is needles to reproduce here. It was debated between Spears, Fraser, and the clerk, all of whom threw themselves into it with heat and energy, the eyes of the grimy little Scotchman gleaming on one after another, throwing sudden light like that of a lantern; while Short talked with great volubility and readiness, and Spears, at the head of the table, held the balance between them. Fraser was for closing with the official offer, and securing land before they made their start, while the clerk held in his hand the plans of a new township and the proposals of a land company, which seemed to him the most advantageous. Spears, for his

part, was opposed to both. He was for waiting until they had arrived at their destination, and choosing for themselves where they would fix their abode. He, for his part, had no money to buy land, even at the cheapest rate. To take his family out, to support them during the first probationary interval, was as much as he could hope for. The debate rose high among them. Weaver sat with his two elbows resting on the table, and his long pale head supported in his hands, looking from one to another; his mouth and eyes were open with perennial wonder and admiration. Land! he had never possessed anything all his life, and the idea inflamed him. Paul had never taken any part in these practical discussions; he was too logical. If it was wrong for him to enjoy the advantages of wealth at home, he did not see how he could carry any of these advantages away with him, to purchase other advantages on the other side of the world. What right had he to do it? He sat silent, but less patient than Weaver, less admiring, feeling the peculiarities of the men doubly, now that he had associated himself conclusively with them. The clerk's precise little tone, cut and dry—his disquisition upon the rates of interest

and the chances of making a good speculation—Fraser's dusky hands, which he put forward in the heat of argument, beating out emphatic sentences with a short, square forefinger—gave him an impression they had never done before. Short was a little contemptuous (notwithstanding the democratical views which he shared) of the working men, and their knowledge of what ought to be done.

"With the small means at our command," he said, "to go out into the bush would be folly. You can't grow grain or even potatoes in a few weeks. You must have civilisation behind you, and a town where you can push along with your trades till the land begins to pay."

"And how are you to make the land pay without the plough, and somebody to guide it?" said Fraser. "I am not one that holds with civilisation. Most land will pay that's well solicited with a good spade and a good stout arm. We'll take a pickle meal with us, or let's say flour, and the time the corn's growing we'll build our houses and live on our porridge. I do not approve of the Government, but it makes a good offer, and land cannot run away. Make yourself sure of a slice of the land; that is what I'll always say."

"Land," said Spears, with some scorn in his tone, "that may be in the middle of a marsh, or on the cold side of a hill. I put no faith in the Government offer for my part, and a little less than none in your new township, Short. Did you ever read about Eden in Mr. Dickens's book? I object to be slaughtered with fever for the sake of a new land company. Here is my opinion: Take your money with you as you please—in your old stocking, or in bits of paper—I," said the demagogue, "feel the superiority of a man that has no money to take. I've got my head and my hands, and I mean to get *my* farm out of them. But let's see the place first and choose. Let's try the forest primeval, as they call it; but let us take our choice for ourselves."

Fraser, who had projected himself half across the table leaning upon his elbows, and with his emphatic, blunt forefinger extended in act to speak, here interposed, pointing that member at Paul, who said nothing. "What's he going to do? Hasn't *he* got an opinion on the subject! I'm keen to know what a lad will say that has the most money to spend, and the most to lose —and a young fellow forbye;" said the Scot, flashing the light of his eager eyes upon Paul, who sat half-

interested, half-disgusted, holding his refined head, and white hands, and fine linen, a little apart from the group round the table. He started slightly when he heard himself appealed to.

"If it is a false position to possess more than one's neighbours here," he said, "I hold it a still more false position to take what ought to be valuable to the country out of the country. I have very little money either to spend or to lose, and I think with Spears."

"Ah," said the Scotsman, "my lad, it's a frolic for you. You'll go and you'll play at what is life or death to us—and by the time you're tired of the novelty you'll mind upon your folk at home, and your duty to them. I've seen the like before. None like you for giving rash counsels: not that you mean harm: but you know well you've them behind you that will be too glad to have you back. That's not our case—with us it's life or death."

"Hold your tongue, Fraser," said Spears. "This young fellow,"—he laid his hand upon Paul as he spoke, with a kind, paternal air, which perhaps the young man might have liked at another time, but which made him wince now—"is in earnest—no sort of doubt that he's in earnest. He is giving up a great deal more than any

of us are doing. We—that's the worst of it—are making no sacrifice—we're going because it suits us; but, to show his principles, he is giving up—a great deal more than was ever within our reach."

"A man cannot give up more than he has got," said the clerk. "What we are sacrificing is every bit as much to us."

Spears kept his hand on Paul's arm. He meant it very kindly, but it was warm and heavy, and Paul had all the desire in the world to pitch it off. He did not care for the paternal character of his instructor's kindness.

"I don't know what you are giving up," said Spears. "I have got nothing to sacrifice, except perhaps a little bit of a perverse liking for the old country, bad as she is. It takes away a good deal of my pride in myself, if the truth were known, to feel that after all the talk I've gone through in my life, it isn't for principle that I'm going, but to better myself. I told this young fellow he oughtn't to go—that is the truth. He has no reason to be discontented. As long as the present state of things holds out, it's to his interest, and doubly to his interest, to stay where he is. But this isn't the

kind of fellow to stand on what's pleasant to himself. He's coming for the grand sake of the cause—eh, Paul? —or if there's another little bit of motive alongside, why that's nothing to anybody. We are not going to make a talk of that."

To imagine anything more distasteful to Paul than this speech would be impossible. Only by the most strenuous exercise of self-control could he keep from thrusting off Spears's hand, his intolerable approval, and still more intolerable pleasantry. He got up at last, unable to bear it any longer. "We didn't come here to comment on each other's motives," he said. "Suppose you go on with the business we met for, Spears."

It was a little relief to get out of reach of the other's hand. He stood up against the narrow little mantelpiece behind Spears's chair. It was heaped with picture-frames, and the drawing which Spears had been making in the morning stood there propped up against the wall; the great foxglove from which he had designed it lay in a heap along with the other flowers which he had rejected, swept up into the fireplace. A faint odour of crushed stalks and broken flowers came from them. They were swept up

carelessly with the dust, their bright petals peeping from under all the refuse of the shop, dishonoured and broken. Paul thought it was symbolical. He stood and looked—more dispassionately from a distance—at the rough, forcible head of the demagogue, and the countenance all seamed and grimy of the Scotsman, who was concentrating the keen light of his eyes upon Spears. The clerk, on the other hand, clean, neat, and commonplace, did not seem to belong to the same world, while the feeble, long head of Weaver was as the ghost and shadow of the other animated and vigorous faces. The light of the mean little paraffin lamp threw a yellow glow on them, but left in darkness all the corners of the shop, the large shuttered window, full of picture-frames, and the cavernous opening of the stairs which led to Spears's house—and filled the place with an odour which the accustomed senses of the others took no notice of, but which to Paul was almost insupportable. He had assisted at these conferences before; but however he had busied himself in the details of the meetings, however earnestly and gravely he had posed (to his own consciousness) as one of them, yet he had never been one of them. He had been a spectator

not an actor in the drama, little referred to, scarcely believed in by the others; and he had taken them calmly, as it is so easy to take those with whom we have nothing to do. But now that he was entirely committed to their society, now that he had burnt his ships, and shut every door of escape behind him, a new light seemed to shine upon them. The smoky lamp, the smell of the paraffin, the grimy haze about Fraser, the feeble whiteness of the other, the little clerk, all smooth and smug, with his talk of capital and interest —Paul seemed never to have seen them before. These were to be henceforward his companions, fellow-founders of a new society.

Paul felt himself grow giddy where he stood. Their talk went on; they discussed and argued, but it was only a kind of hum in his ears. He did not care what conclusion they came to—they themselves struck him like a revelation. Perhaps if any other four men in the world had thus been separated from all others as the future sharers of his life, his feelings would have been much the same. Four Dons for instance; suppose a group out of the Common-room put in the place of these workmen, would they have been more supportable?

He asked himself this question vaguely, wistfully. Could he have put his future in their hands with more confidence? or was it simply that the contemplation of any such group as representing all your society for the rest of your life was alarming? Paul put this question to himself with a curious dizziness and sense of weakness.

The stair, which has been several times referred to, went straight up like a ladder from the side of the shop opposite the door, and the upper part of it was of the most primitive description, mounting as through a large trap-door to the floor above. As he stood listening without hearing, seeing through a mist, Paul caught sight in the darkness of some one standing under the shadow of this stair watching and listening. The men at the table were closely engaged. They took no further notice of the young man whom they could not believe in as one of themselves. Even Spears, in the fervour of discussion, forgot Paul. He stood in all the freedom of a bystander, thinking his own thoughts, while his eyes rested upon the group, taking in the whole picture before him vaguely, as a picture; and it was at this moment that he became aware, not only of this vague

and shadowy figure, but of a head put out round the corner of the stair, with a dart and tremble of curiosity. It was the fair head of Janet Spears, with all its frizz of loose locks. At first it was but a dart, rapid and frightened; then, as she perceived the absorption of the others, and saw that she had caught Paul's attention, she took courage. She gave a glance at them as Paul was doing, but with a hundred times more conscious scorn, and then put all the contempt and ridicule of which eyes were capable into the look with which she turned to Paul, shrugging her shoulders at the group. Her next proceeding was to point to the door, and invite him, as plainly as signs could do it, to meet her there. Paul grew red as he received these signs, with wonder and alarm, and a curious kind of shamefacedness. Was it the strangest unpardonable liberty the girl was taking? or had she a right to do it? With a rapid gesture she gave him to understand that he must come out, and that he would find her at the door.

Janet had never been presuming; she had not been a coquette; she had done nothing to call to herself the attention of the young theorists who frequented her father's shop. But everything was different now, and she

felt herself not only at liberty to make signals to Paul, but conferring a favour on him by so doing. He was sick of the consultation in which he did not care to take any part, and weary at heart of all the strange circumstances around him. And the paraffin was very disagreeable. Why should he not obey Janet's signs, and go and meet her outside? At least it could not be any worse than this. After a few moments of struggle with himself, Paul announced quietly that he was going. "My presence can make no difference," he said. They scarcely heard him, so busy were they with their argument. No Rembrandt could have surpassed the curious group of heads set in the surrounding darkness, with the light of the lamp so fully upon them, and all so intent and full of living interest. Spears turned round and gave him a good-humoured nod as he went away. He was half-vexed to be deserted; yet he smiled —was it not natural? Outside, though it was a little bye-street, and not immaculate, the air was sweeter than in that atmosphere of paraffin; but it was with a curious sense of humiliation and surprise at his own position, that Paul saw Janet's dark, slim figure stealing out at another door. That he should meet a girl under

the light of a street-lamp, jostled by passers-by, remarked upon as Janet Spears's lover, seemed something incredible. Yet he was doing it; he scarcely could tell why. She came stealing close up to him, with just the attitude and gesture he had seen in other humble pairs of love-makers, and Paul could not help wondering, with a sharp sting of self-scorn, whether he was as like the ordinary hero of such encounters as she was like the heroine. Janet came up to him however with all the fervour of a purpose. She put out her hand, and gave a touch to his arm.

"Did you hear what I said?—did you think of what I was saying?" she asked. "Father came just when he wasn't wanted. Perhaps you'll think me a bold girl to call you out here; but it's for your good. Oh, Mr. Paul, don't listen to all that nonsense! What should *you* go away for? You're a deal better off here than you ever would be there. Father may have some excuse. He thinks, I suppose, as he's getting old, and as it would be better for me and the girls to be out there. I don't think so. I'd rather be anything at home. I'd rather take a situation. Still, father has an excuse. But you—what do you want among men like them?—

you that are a gentleman. You never could put up with them. And why should you go?—think a moment —why should you go?"

"It is very good of you to interest yourself about me," said Paul, feeling himself so much stiffer and more solemn than he had ever been before, "but I have chosen with my eyes open. I have done what I thought best."

"Oh, *of course* I interest myself in you. Who should I interest myself in?" cried Janet, "above everything! And that is why I say don't meddle with them; don't have anything to do with them. Oh, when you have a father that will give you whatever you like; when you have your pockets full of money; when, if you just wait a little, you will have a title, and everything heart could desire—*why* should you go a long sea voyage, and mix yourself up with a parcel of working men? "*Why?*" cried Janet, with a wonderment that was slightly mingled with scorn, yet was impassioned in its vehemence. "I would not demean myself like that, not for all the world."

Paul stood and looked at her almost moved to laughter by the strangeness of the position. Spears's daughter!

but the laughter would not have been sweet. That strange paradox, and the still stranger one of his own meeting with his supposed love under the lamp-post, filled him with the profoundest mortification, wonder, and yet amusement. It seemed beyond the power of belief, and yet it was true.

CHAPTER X.

SIR WILLIAM was better when he got home. When he reached his own house he began to hold up his head, to hold himself, if not erect as of old, yet in a way more like himself. He walked firmly into the house, always with Fairfax's arm, and said, "I am better, Brown; yes, much better," when Brown met him, very anxious and effusive, at the door. "I feel almost myself," he said, turning round to Lady Markham. And so he looked—himself ten years older, but yet with something of the old firmness and precise composure. How he could thus recover, though the letter in his pocket-book bore the postmark of Markham Royal, and he had come back into the very presence of the danger which at a distance had overwhelmed him, it would be difficult to tell. "He's picked up wonderful," Mr. Jarvis, Sir

William's own man, said to Mr. Brown; "but for all that, he's got notice to quit—he have. Just see if I ain't right." Mrs. Fry was of the same opinion when she saw her master. She had never had any comfort in her mind, she declared, since she heard of these faintings. All the Markhams went like that. The late Sir Paul had done just the same—nothing to speak of at first, and nobody alarmed—but it was a thing that went fast, that was, Mrs. Fry said. They were all very gloomy about Sir William down stairs, but in the family there was no such alarm. He put away his trouble, or rather, as he emerged out of the suffering of his attack into physical comfort again, and no longer felt the blood ebbing, as it were, from his heart, and consciousness failing in the giddy void into which he had seemed to sink, nature in him declined to remember it, turned away from it. The familiar house, the waving of the woods, the stately quiet about him, healed him, and he would not allow himself to be pulled back. He came to dinner, and occupied his place as usual, looking really, his wife and daughter thought, almost quite himself. This almost made up to them, poor ladies, for the moment—for all that it had cost them to

leave Oxford in such melancholy uncertainty about Paul.

But there was one of the party who was not at his ease. Fairfax, who had come away on the spur of the moment without any provision for a visit, and who felt his presence here to be mere accident, nothing more, scarcely knew what to do or say. After he had helped Sir William up stairs on their arrival, he came to Lady Markham, confused yet smiling, with his hat in his hand. "I must take my leave now. I hope Sir William will go on mending, and no longer have need of my arm as a walking-stick."

"Your leave!" said Lady Markham, "what does that mean? Do you think after taking the use of you all the way here that I am going to let you go away without making acquaintance with Markham? No, no; you are going to stay."

"I came as a walking-stick," said the young man; "and I have brought nothing," he added, laughing. "That is the disadvantage of a walking-stick which is human, which wants tooth-brushes and all kinds of things. Besides, I am of no further use. Sir William is better, and there are shoals of men here."

"You make us out to be pleasant people," said Lady Markham, "getting rid of our friends as soon as we have need of them no longer. That will never do. You must send for your things, and in the meantime there is Paul's wardrobe to fall back upon. He always leaves a number of things here."

"But——" said Fairfax, flushing very deeply. He was not handsome, like Paul. There was a look of easy good-humour, kindness, sympathy about him, a desire to please, a readiness to be serviceable. He had brown eyes, which were clear and kind; brown hair, crisp and curling; a pleasant mouth; but nothing in his features or his aspect that could be called distinguished. Pleasure, embarrassment, difficulty, a desire to say something, yet a reluctance to say it, were all mingled in his face; but the pleasure was the strongest. He gave an appealing look at Alice, as if entreating her to help him out.

"I want no buts," said Lady Markham. "I want to go to Sir William, and you are detaining me with a foolish argument which you know you cannot convince me by. Send for your things, and Brown will show you your room: and we can talk it all

over," she said, smiling, "as soon as your portmanteau is here."

Fairfax made her an obeisance as he might have done to a queen. He stood with his hat in his hand and his head bowed while she passed him going out of the room. Every young man, it is to be supposed, has some youthful feminine ideal in his mind, but to Fairfax Lady Markham was a new revelation. He knew, if not by experience, yet from all the poets, that there were creatures like her daughter in the world; that they were the flower and blossom of humanity, supposed to be the most beautiful things in life; but the next step from the Alices of creation was into a darkness he knew nothing of. Age, or a youth that was pretended, false, and disgusting, swallowed up all the rest. A mother (he had never known his own) was an old stager or an old campaigner, a dragon or a matchmaker, the gaoler or the executioner of her girls, the greatest danger to all men; scheming with deadly wiles to get rid of her daughters; then, in the terrible capacity of mother-in-law, using all these wiles to get the girls who had escaped from her, back, and make the lives of their husbands miserable. This is the conception which

the common Englishman gets from his light literature of all women who are not young. Fairfax was no worse than his kind; he had never known his own mother, and the name was not sacred to him. But when Lady Markham came within his ken the young man was bewildered. He could understand Alice, but he could not understand the woman who was so beautiful and gracious, and yet Markham's mother. She dazzled him, and filled him with shame and generous compunction. Her very smile was a fresh wonder. He was half afraid of her, yet to disobey or rebel against her seemed to him a thing impossible. The revelation of this mother even changed the character of his relations with Alice, for whom, on the first sight of her, the natural attraction of the natural mate, the wondering interest, admiration, and pleasure, which, if not love, is the first beginning of the state of love—had caught him all at once. The mother brought a softening as of domestic trust and affection into this nascent feeling. Alice was brought the nearer to him, by some inexplainable magic, because of the dazzling superiority of this elder unknown princess, whose very existence was a miracle to him. When Lady Markham

had gone out, with a smile and gracious bend of her head in answer to his reverential salutation, Fairfax came back to Alice with a certain awe in his look, which was half contradicted, half heightened, by the wavering of the smile upon his face, in which there mingled something like amusement at his own sense of awe.

"Miss Markham, may I ask your advice?" he said.

"You are frightened at mamma," said Alice, with a soft laugh. "Oh, but you need not! She is as kind—as kind—as if she were only old nurse," Alice said, in despair of finding a better illustration.

"Don't be profane!" cried Fairfax, with uplifted hands. "Yes, I am frightened. I never knew that anybody's mother could be like that. But, Miss Markham, will you give me your advice?"

"Is your mother—not living, Mr. Fairfax?"

"She never has been for me—she died so long ago; I am afraid I have never thought much about her. Ought I to stay, Miss Markham?" He raised his eyes to her with a piteous look, yet one that was half comic in its earnestness, and a sudden blush, unawares, as their eyes met, flamed over both faces. For why? How could they tell? It was so, and they knew no more.

"Surely," Alice said; "mamma wishes it, and we all wish it. After showing us so much kindness, you would not go away the moment you have come here?"

"But that is not the question," said Fairfax. "The fact is, I am nobody. Don't laugh, or I shall laugh too, and I am much more disposed to cry. I have a tolerable name, haven't I? but alas! it does not mean anything. I don't know what it means, nor how we came by it. I am one of the unfortunate men, Miss Markham, who—never had a grandfather."

Alice had been waiting with much solemnity for the secret which made him so profoundly grave (yet there was a twinkle, too, which nothing but the deepest misfortune could quench, in the corner of his eye). When this statement came, however, she was taken with a sudden fit of laughter. Could anything be more absurd? And yet in her heart she felt a sudden chill, a sense of horror. Alice would not have owned it, but this was a terrible statement for any young man on the verge of intimacy to make. No grandfather! It was a misfortune she could not understand.

"At least, none to speak of," he said, the fun

growing in his eyes. "You should not laugh, Miss Markham. Don't you think it is hard upon a man? To come to an enchanted palace, where he would give his head to be allowed to stay, and to feel that for no fault of his, for a failure which he is not responsible for, which can be laid only to the score of those ancestors who did not exist——"

"Mr. Fairfax, no one was thinking of your grandfather."

"I know that; but, dear Miss Markham, you know very well that to-night, or to-morrow night, or a year hence, your mother, before whom I feel disposed to go down upon my knees, will say with her smile, 'Are you of the Norfolk Fairfaxes, or the Westchester family, or——?' And I, with shame, will begin to say, Madam, of no Fairfaxes at all.' What will she think of me then? Will not she think that I have done wrong to be here—that I had no right to stay?"

"Oh, Mr. Fairfax!" cried Alice, somewhat pale and troubled; "how can I advise you? Mamma is not a fanatic about family. She does not build upon it to that extent. I do not see why she should ever ask you. It is no business of ours." Alice was not strong enough

to have such a tremendous question thrown upon her to decide. As a matter of fact, she knew that her mother would very soon make those inquiries about the Westchester family and the Norfolk Fairfaxes. Already Lady Markham had indulged in speculations on the subject, and had begun to remember that in the one case she "used to know" a cousin of his, and in the other had met his uncle, the ambassador, and saw a great deal of him once in Paris. She grew quite pale, and her eyes puckered up and took the most anxious aspect. Besides, it was a shock to herself. That absence of a grandfather was a want which was almost indecent. She did not understand it, and she was extremely sorry for him. He had no home then—no house that his people had lived in for ages—no people. Poor boy!

And Fairfax's countenance also fell, in reflection of hers. However deep may be one's private consciousness of one's own deficiencies, there is always a little expectation in one's mind that other people will make light of them; but when you see your own dismay, and more than your own dismay, in the eyes of your counsellor, then is the moment when you sink into the abyss. His lip quivered for a moment, and though it eventually

succeeded in forming into a smile, the smile was very tremulous and uncertain.

"I see," he said; "no need for another word. Good-bye. I have had a glimpse into—the garden of Eden, though I must not stay."

"Mr. Fairfax!" cried Alice, as he turned away. "Come back—come back this moment! How dare you take me up so? Do you want to get me into trouble," she cried, half crying, half laughing, "with mamma? Would you like to have her—beat me?"

"She does so sometimes?"

"To be sure," cried Alice, with an unsteady laugh. "Oh, Mr. Fairfax, what a fright you have given me! You have made my heart beat!"

"Not so much as mine," he said. They had their laugh, and then they stood once more looking at each other. "It is all very well," said the young man; "you want to spare my feelings; you would not hurt any one. But beyond that, you know as well as I do that Lady Markham, knowing who I am, would not like to have me here."

"Who are you?" said Alice, with a little renewed alarm; and in her mind she tried to remember whether

there had been any trials in the papers, any criminals who bore this name.

"I am nobody at all," said Fairfax. "I haven't even the distinction of being improper, or belonging to people who have made themselves notable either for evil or good. I am nobody. That is precisely what I want Lady Markham to understand."

"I think, Mr. Fairfax," said Alice, "you had better go and send for your things, as mamma said."

"You think I may?"

He looked at her with eyes full of pleasure and gratitude, putting more meaning into her words than they would bear, and getting a thrill of conscious happiness out of the little arbitrary tone which, half in jest and half to hide her real doubts, Alice put on. He was so glad to obey, to say to himself that it was their own doing and that they could not blame him for it, so happy to be made to remain as he persuaded himself. The children rushed in as he went away to obey what he called to himself the order he had received, eager to know who he was, and making a hundred inquiries about all kinds of things—about papa's illness, why he looked so grey, and what was

the matter with him; about Paul, why he did not come home; about Mr. Fairfax, who he was, what he was, what he was doing there, whether he was going to stay. There was scarcely a question that could be put on these subjects which the ingenious children did not ask; and Alice was glad finally to suggest that they should walk to the village with Mr. Fairfax and show him where the post-office was, that he might telegraph for his portmanteau. They were quite willing to take this on themselves. "We shall be sure to see the little gentleman," Bell said. "Who is the little gentleman?" asked Alice; but she had so many things to think of that she did not pay any attention to the reply, which was made by all the four voices at once. What did it matter? She had a hundred things so much more important to think of.

And when the children had been sent off, forming a guard of honour about Fairfax, cross-examining him to their heart's content, and in their turn communicating much information which was quite novel to him, Alice thought she was very glad of the quiet and the interval of rest. Sir William was resting, declaring himself much better; and Lady Markham, in the

relief of this fact, was lying down on the sofa, getting half an hour's doze after her sleepless night. Alice had not slept much more than her mother, but she could not doze. After a while a sensation of regret stole into her mind that she had not accompanied the others. There was a soft breeze blowing among the trees which freshened the aspect of nature, and the sky was blue and tender, doubly blue after the smoky half-colour of a town. Alice sat by the window and watched the flickering of the leaves, and wished she had gone with them. Something seemed wanting to her. To be alone and free to rest, did not seem the privilege she had thought it. She wanted—what? Some one to speak to, some one's eyes to meet hers. The leaves ruffled and seemed to call her; the little breeze came and whispered at the edge of the window, blowing the lace curtains about. All the world invited her, wooed her, to go out into the fresh air, into the green avenue, into the joyful yet silent world. "The air would have done me good," Alice said to herself; and her voice came back to her out of the silence as if it had been somebody else's voice. Then by degrees it came into her head that the air would still

do her good if she went out now, which somehow did not exactly hit her wishes. After this, however, it occurred to her that to stroll down the avenue and meet them as they came back would not be amiss, and much comforted by this suggestion she ran to get her hat. Would they be glad to see her, or would they ask her loudly why she came out now, when nobody wanted her. Brothers and sisters under fourteen are apt to express opinions of this sort very plainly. Alice felt angry at the idea, but afterwards melted, and represented to herself that to meet them in the avenue was of all the courses open to her the best.

Sir William was able to come down stairs to dinner, which was more than any one had hoped, and after dinner he came into the dining-room with the ladies, and saw the children, as he had always been in the habit of doing, while he took his coffee. A recovery of this kind from a sudden fit of illness has often the most softening and happy effect. He had a great deal of care on his mind, but the sensation of getting better seemed to chase it all away. He seemed to be getting better of that too, to be getting over it, before it ever

came to anything. Had he been in his usual condition he would have known very well that he had got over nothing, that it was all waiting for him round the corner of the very next day, or even hour; but Sir William convalescent was not in his usual state of mind. He felt as if he had got over it, as if it all lay behind him—the perplexity, and the trouble, and alarm. He sat in his great chair, with cushions placed about him, looking so much older, and so much softer, more indulgent and more talkative. A kind of garrulousness had come upon him. He told his children stories of his own childhood. He was not put out by their restlessness, by their interruptions, as he generally was. Never had he been so gentle, so amiable. He told them all about an adventure of his in the woods with his brothers, when he had been about Roland's age. It was like the story of old Grouse in the gun-room to the little Markhams; they knew exactly where to laugh, and what questions to ask to show their interest, and they conducted themselves with the greatest propriety, not even putting him right when he deviated from the correct routine of the story, which they remembered better than he did. It was only after

this wonderful tale was over that Bell made the unfortunate remark which brought a new transformation. How should the child know there was any harm in it? "Oh," she cried suddenly, "look, Harry! look, Marie! As papa sits there, now! Did you ever see anything so like the little gentleman?" and Bell clasped her hands together in admiring contemplation of this strange fact.

There was a pause. Had it not been for the entire ignorance of the easy household, calm, and fearing no evil, it might have been thought that a shiver ran through the air, as this crisis suddenly developed itself out of the quiet: every one was quite still. They all looked at the child with amused curiosity—all but one. And though there was nothing meant by it the effect was strange. It was left to Sir William to speak, which he did in a clear, thin voice, suddenly becoming judicial and solemn.

"Whom do you mean by the little gentleman, Bell?"

"Oh, he is a relation—he told us so," said the little girl.

"And he has brought me some sweetmeats from

abroad—me!—though he didn't know my name. What sort of things would you call sweetmeats, mamma?"

"And he is living down at the Markham Arms. We saw him to-day. He jumped into the railway carriage with Dolly Stainforth."

"Oh, but I saw him come back—following the carriage," cried Roland. "He stood at the station-gate to see you pass, papa, and looked so sorry. That was him, Alice, that stopped us when we went to the village with Mr. Fairfax. You saw him. He wanted to shake hands all round."

The pause now, after this clamour of voices, was more curious than ever. Lady Markham began to wonder a little.

"A relation!—who could it be? Do you know of any relation who would not have come to us straight? I do not think it could be a relation. You must have made a mistake."

"Oh, no; we have not made any mistake," cried the children with one voice. "Besides, he was such friends with us. He promised to give us quantities of things; and then he is like papa."

"I don't think Sir William is well," said Fairfax,

hurriedly. He rose up with an exclamation of terror, and Lady Markham sprang to her feet and rushed to her husband's side.

"I am feeling—a little faint," he said, in a half-whisper, with a tremendous attempt to regain command of himself; but it failed. His head drooped, his eyelids quivered, and then lay half-closed upon the dim langour underneath that had lost all power of seeing; his breath laboured, and came in gasps from his pale lips. All the sudden recovery in which they had been so happy was over. Alice put the children hastily out of the room, like a flock frightened, as she ran to call Jarvis, to get what was necessary, to send for the village doctor. The boys and girls got together into a corner of the hall and cried silently, clinging together in fright and sorrow; or at least the girls cried, wondering—

"Was it anything we said?"

"Oh, I wish—I wish!" cried Bell, but in a whisper, "that I had not said anything about the little gentleman!"

But of all the family she was the only one that thought of this. The others though they were much alarmed

were not surprised. There was nothing, alàs! more natural than that these fits should come on again. The doctor had expected it. They said to each other that he had been more tired with the journey than they supposed—that indeed it was certain in his state of health that he must be worn out by the journey: the wonder only was that he had revived at all. He was carried to his room after a while, the children looking on drearily from their corner, full of dismay. To them nothing seemed to be too dreadful to be expected.

"Oh, why does papa look so pale?" Marie sobbed, with that blighting terror which seizes a child at the first sight of such signs of mortality. Even the boys had much to do to rub away out of the corners of their eyes the sudden burst of tears.

"I am better—much better," the sick man said, when he came to himself, "but very weak. You won't allow me to be disturbed? I cannot see any one—it is impossible for me to see any one, Isabel."

"Do you think I will let you be disturbed?" said Lady Markham. "And who would disturb you? Do you forget, William, that we are at home?"

But that word, so full of consolation, fell upon him

with no healing in it. Yes, he knew very well that he was at home, and that his enemy who had been waiting for him all these years—his enemy who meant him no harm, who meant no one any harm—the deadliest foe of the children and their mother, his own reproach and shame—that innocent yet mortal enemy was close to him, lurking among the trees, behind the peaceful houses in the village, to disturb him as no one else could. His wife put back the curtain so as to shield his feeble eyes from the lamp, and sat down—anxious, yet serene—wondering at his strange fancy. Disturb him! Who could disturb him here?

CHAPTER XI.

THIS time Sir William did not get better as he had done before. His third fainting-fit proved the beginning of an illness at which the village doctor looked very grave. It was still but a very short time since he had come down from London, relieved at the end of the session, to enjoy his well-earned leisure, with everything prosperous around him, nothing but the little vexation of Paul's vagaries to give him a prick now and then, a reminder that he too was subject to the ills of mortality. What a happy house it had been to which the tired statesman had come home! When he had taken his seat by the side of Alice in the little pony-carriage there had been nothing but assured peace and comfort in his mind. Paul:—yes—Paul has been a vexation; but no more. Now all that brightness was overcast; the happy

children in their holiday freedom were hushed in their own corner of the house no longer allowed to roam through it wherever they pleased. Lady Markham, with all pretty gowns, her lace and ornaments put away, lived in her husband's sick-room, or came down stairs now and then with an anxious smile, "like someone coming to call," the little girls said. Alice had become not Alice, but a sort of emissary between the outside world and that little hidden world up stairs in which the life of the house seemed concentrated. As for Sir William, he lay between life and death. First one, then another great London physician had come down to see him—but all that they could suggest had done him little or no good. All over the country messengers came every day for news of him; the head of the government, and even the Queen herself, and all the leading members of the party sent telegrams of inquiry; and there were already flutters of expectation in the town he represented as to the chances of the Liberal interest, "should anything happen." Even into Lady Markham's mind, as she sat in the silent room, often darkened and always quiet, trying hard to keep herself from thinking, there would come thoughts, dreary previsions of change, floating like

clouds across her mental firmament, against her will, in spite of all her precautions—visions of darkness and blackness and solitude which she tried in vain to shut out. Her husband lying so still under the high canopies of the bed, from which all curtains and everything that could obstruct the free circulation of air had been drawn aside, capable of no independent action, but still the centre of every thought and plan—was it possible to imagine him absent altogether, swept away out of the very life in which he had been the chief actor! These thoughts did not come by any will of hers, but drifted gloomily across her mind as she sat silent, sometimes trying to read, mechanically going over page after page, but knowing nothing of the meaning of the words that were under her eyes. To realise the death of the sufferer whom one is nursing is, save when death is too close to be any longer ignored, not only a shock, but a wrong, a guilt, a horror. Is it not like signing his sentence, agreeing that he is to die? Lady Markham felt as if she had consented to the worst that could happen when these visions of the future drifted across her mind.

Meanwhile who can describe the sudden dreariness of the house upon which in full sunshine of youth

and enjoyment this blight came? The boys wished themselves at school—could there be any stronger evidence of the gloom around them?—the girls grew sad and cross, and cried for nothing at all. Fairfax lingered on, not knowing what to do, afraid to trouble the anxious ladies even by proposing to go away, obliterating himself as much as he could, though doing everything that Paul, had he been there, would have been expected to do. Paul did not come till a week after, though he was written to every day—but in that week a great many things had happened. For one thing Lady Markham had seen and spoken with the stranger who was living at the Markham Arms in the village, and who had introduced himself to the children as a relation. She had heard nothing of Mr. Gus except that one mention of him by little Bell on the night of the return, and that had made no great impression on her mind. It had been immediately before the recurrence of Sir William's faint, which had naturally occupied all her thoughts, and how could it be supposed that Lady Markham would remember a thing of such small importance? It surprised her much to meet in the hall that strange little figure in light,

loose clothes, standing hat in hand, as she went from one room to another. Sir William then had been but a few days ill, and Lady Markham had hitherto resolutely kept herself from all those drifting shadows of fear. It was one of the days when she had come to "make a call" on her children. Sir William was asleep, and she persuaded herself that he was better, she had come down, as she said, to tell them the good news; but her smile as she told it was so tremulous, that little Bell, whose nerves had got entirely out of order, began to cry. And then they all cried together for a minute, and were a little eased by it. Alice protested that she was crying for joy because papa was better, and that it was very silly, but she could not help it; and Lady Markham had all the brightness of tears in her eyes as she came out into the hall on her way back to the sick-room; and lo, there before her in the hall, stood the little gentleman, bowing, with his hat in his hand.

"I think you must have heard of me, Lady Markham," he said.

She looked at him, with a kind of horror that a stranger should be able to find and detain her—she who ought to be by her husband's bedside. In her capacity

of nurse it seemed almost as great a crime to intercept her as it would be to disturb Sir William; but she was too courteous to express her horror.

"I do not think so," she said, with a conciliatory smile which was intended to take off any edge of offence that might be found in her profession of ignorance. Then she looked at the card which he handed to her. "Perhaps this ought to be given to Brown. Ah! but now I remember. You are related to some kind people, the Lennys, who were here."

"Have the Lennys been here?" said Mr. Gus, with unfeigned surprise. "Yes, I am a relation of theirs also; but in the meantime there is a much nearer relationship."

"I am sure Mr. Gaveston," said Lady Markham, with a smile by which she begged pardon for what she was saying, "that you will not think it rude if I leave you now. I don't like to be long away from Sir William. When he wakes he may miss me."

"Lady Markham," said Mr. Gus, "I wish you would let me speak to you. I do wish it indeed. It would be so much easier afterwards——"

She looked at him with genuine surprise, then with

a glance round her up the great staircase, where she wished to go, and round the open doors by which no one came for her deliverance, she yielded unwillingly. "I fear I can only give you a few minutes," she said, and led the way into the library. She had done so without for the moment thinking that her husband's room was scarcely a place in which, at this moment, to discourse placidly with a stranger on subjects of which she was ignorant. It was so full of him. His books, his papers, all arranged as if he had that moment left them; his chair at its usual angle, as if he were seated in it unseen; everything marked with the more than good order, the precision and formal regularity of all Sir William's habits. The things which mark the little foibles of character, the innocent weaknesses of habit, are those which go most to the heart when death is threatening a member of a household. The sight of all these little *fads*, which sometimes annoyed her, and sometimes made her laugh when all was well, gave Lady Markham a shock of sudden pain and sudden *attendrissement*. Her heart had been soft enough before to her husband; it melted now in a suffusion of tender love and grief. Her eyes filled.

Might it be that he never should sit at that table again?

"I am sure," she said, making once more the same instinctive appeal to the sympathy of the stranger, "that you will not detain me longer than you can help, for my husband is very ill. I cannot help being very anxious——" She could not say any more.

"I am very sorry, Lady Markham—but that is the very thing that makes it so important. May I ask if it is possible you have never heard of me? Never even *heard* of me!—that is the strangest thing of all."

In her surprise she managed better to get rid of her tears. She gave a startled glance at him, and then at the card she still held in her hand. "I cannot quite say that—for Mrs. Lenny and the Colonel both spoke—I cannot say of you—but of a family called Gaveston whom Sir William had known. You are the son, I presume, of an old friend? My husband, Mr. Gaveston," said Lady Markham, with warmth, "is not a man to be indifferent to old friends. You may be sure he would have been glad to see you, and done his best to make Markham pleasant to you:—but the circumstances—explain——"

"Then," said her strange companion with a certain air of sternness which changed the character of his face, "that is all you know?"

She looked at the card again. How was it she had not noticed the second name before? I see you have Markham in your name," she said; "I had not noticed. Is there then some distant relationship? But Mrs. Lenny never claimed to be a relation: or perhaps —I see! you are Sir William's godson," Lady Markham said, with a smile which was somewhat forced and uncomfortable. She kept her eyes upon him, uneasy, not knowing what might come next, vaguely foreseeing something which must wound her.

Mr. Gus's brown countenance grew red—he gave forth a sharp and angry laugh. "His *god*son," he said; "and that is all you know?"

Lady Markham grew far more red than he had done. Her beautiful face became crimson. The heat of shame and distress upon it seemed to get into her eyes. What was this suspicion that was flung into her mind like a fire-brand? and in this place where her husband's blameless life had been passed, and at this moment when he was ill, perhaps approaching the end of all

things! "Mr. Gaveston," she said, trembling, "I cannot, I cannot hear any more. It is not to me you ought to come, and at such a time! Oh, if you have been put in any false position—if you have been subjected to humiliation, by anything my husband has done——" Her voice was choked by the growing heat and pain of her agitation; even to have such a horrible thought suggested to her now seemed cruelty incredible. It was wrong on her part to allow it to cross the threshold of a mind which was sacred to *him*. "Oh," she cried, wringing her hands, "if you have had anything to suffer, I am sorry for you, with all my heart! but I cannot hear any more now—do not ask me to hear any more now! Another time, anything we can do for you, any amends that can be made to you—but oh, for God's sake, think of the state he is lying in, and say no more now!"

Mr. Gus listened with wonder, irritation, and dismay. That she should be excited was natural, but with respect to their meaning, her words were like raving to him. He could not tell what she meant. Do anything for him, make him amends!—was the woman mad? He only stared at her blankly, and did not make any reply.

Then she held out her hand to him, trying to smile, with her eyes full of tears. "It shall not do you any harm eventually," she said, "your kindness now. Thank you for not insisting now. I have not left—Sir William for so long a time since he was ill."

She made a pause before her husband's name. If it were possible that there might be a link between him and this stranger—a link as strong as——! It made her heart sick to think upon it; but she would not think upon it. It flashed upon her mind only, but was not permitted to stay there: and half because of real anxiety to get back to the sick-room, half from a still greater eagerness to get rid of her visitor, she made a step towards the door.

"If you will let me say so," said Mr. Gus, "you oughtn't to shut yourself up in a sick-room. You may think me an enemy, but I'm no enemy. I wish you all well. I like the children. I think I could be very fond, if she'd let me, of Alice, and I admire you——"

"Sir!" Lady Markham said. She turned her astonished eyes upon him with a blaze in them which would have frightened most men; then opened the door with great 'stateliness and dignity, ignoring the

attempt he made to do it for her. "I must bid you good morning," she said, making him a curtsey worthy of a queen—then walked across the hall with the same dignity; but as soon as she was out of sight, flew up stairs, and, before going to her husband, went to her own room for a time to compose herself. She felt herself outraged, insulted—a mingled sense of rage and wonder had taken possession of her gentle soul. Who was this man, and what could he mean by his claim upon her, his impudent expressions of interest in the family, as if he belonged to the family? Was it not bad enough to put a stigma upon her husband at the moment when he was dying, and when all her thoughts were full of the tenderest veneration for him, and recollection of all his goodness! To throw this shadow of the sins of his youth, even vaguely, upon Sir William's honourable, beautiful age, was something like a crime. It was like desecration of the holiest sanctuary. Lady Markham could not but feel indignant that any man should seize this moment to put forth such a claim—and to make it to *her*, disturbing her ideal, introducing doubt and shame into her love, just at the moment when all her tenderness was most wanted! it was cruel. And then,

as if that was not enough, to assume familiarity, to speak of her child as Alice, this stranger, this ——! Delicate woman as she was, Lady Markham, in her mind, applied as hard a word to Mr. Gus as the severest of plainspoken men could have used. She seemed to see far, far back in the mists of distance, a young man falling into temptation and sin, and some deceitful girl—must it not have been a deceitful girl? —working upon his innocence. This is how, when the heart is sore, such blame is apportioned. He it was who must have been seduced and deluded. How long ago? some fifty years ago, for the man looked as old as Sir William. When this occurred to her, her heart gave a leap of joy. Perhaps the story was all a lie—a fiction. He did look almost as old as Sir William; how could it be possible? It must be a lie.

When she came as far as this she bathed her eyes and composed herself, and went back to her husband's room. He was still asleep, and Lady Markham took her usual place where she could watch him without disturbing him, and took her knitting which helped to wile away the long hours of her vigil. If the knitting could but have occupied her mind as it did her hands!

but in the quiet all her thoughts came back; her mind became a court of justice, in which the arguments on each side were pleaded before a most anxious, yet, alas, too clear-sighted judge. This stranger, who figured as the accuser, was arraigned before her, and examined in every point of view. He was strange; he was not like the men whom Lady Markham was used to see; but he did not look like an impostor. She tried to herself to prove him so, but she could not do it. He was not like an impostor. In his curious foreignness and presumption, he yet had the air of a true man. But then, she said to herself, how ignorant, how foolish he must be, how incapable of any just thought or feeling of shame. To come to *her!* If he had indeed a claim upon Sir William, there were other ways of making that claim; but that he should come to her—Sir William's wife—and oh, at such a time! This was the refrain of her thoughts to which she came back and back. As she sat there in the darkened room, her fingers busy with her knitting, her ears intent to hear the slightest movement the sleeper made, this was how her mind was employed. Perhaps when they had gone through all these stages, her thoughts came back with

a still more exquisite tenderness to the sick man lying there, she thought, so unconscious of this old, old sin of his which had come back to find him out. How young he must have been at the time, poor boy!—younger than Paul—and away from all his friends, no one to think of him as Paul had, to pray for him—a youth tossed into the world to sink or to swim. Lady Markham's heart melted with sympathy. And to make up for that youthful folly, in which perhaps he was sinned against as well as sinning, what a life of virtue and truth he had led ever since. She cast her thoughts back upon the past with a glow of tender approval and praise. Who could doubt his goodness? He had done his duty in everything that had been given him to do. He had served his country, he had served his parish, both alike, well; and he had been the Providence of all the poor people dependent upon him. She went over all that part of his career which she had shared, with tears of melancholy happiness coming to her eyes. Nothing there that any one could blame: oh, far from that! everything to be praised. No man had been more good, more kind, more spotless; no one who had trusted in him had ever been disappointed. And what

a husband he had been: what a father he had been! If this were true, if he had done wrong in his youth, had he not amply proved that it was indeed but a folly of youth, a temporary aberration—nothing more. Lady Markham felt that she was a traitor to her husband to sit here by his sick-bed and allow herself to think that he had ever been wicked. Oh, no, he could not have been wicked! it was not possible. She went softly to his bedside to look at him while he slept. Though he was sleeping quietly enough, there was a cloud of trouble on his face. Was it perhaps a reflection from the doubt she had entertained of him, from the floating shadows of old evil that had been blown up like clouds upon his waning sky?

CHAPTER XII.

MR. GUS was much startled by the change in Lady Markham's manner, by her sudden withdrawal and altered looks. Had he offended her? He did not know how. He had been puzzled, much puzzled, by all she had said. She had professed to be sorry for him. Why? Of all who were concerned, Gus felt that he himself was the one whom it was not needful to be sorry for. The others might have some cause for complaint; but nothing could affect him—his position was sure. And it was very mysterious to him what Lady Markham could mean when she professed to be ready to make him amends—for what? Gus could afford to laugh, though, indeed, he was very much surprised. But happily the nature of the mistake which Lady Markham had made, and the cause of her indignation

were things he never guessed at. They did not occur to him. His position had never been in the least degree equivocal in any way. He had known exactly, and everybody around him had known exactly, what it was. Though he had been adopted as his uncle's heir, he had never been kept in the dark—why should he?—as to whose son he was. And when the poor old planter fell into trouble, and the estate of which Gus was to be the heir diminished day by day, "It does not matter for Gus," the old man had said; "you must go back to your own family when I am gone; there's plenty there for you, if there is not much here." Gus had known all about Markham all his life. An old pencil-drawing of the house, feeble enough, yet recognisable still, had been hanging in his room since ever he could remember. It had belonged to his poor young mother, and since the time he had been able to speak he had known it as home. The idea of considering "the second family" had only dawned upon him when he began to plan his voyage "home," after his uncle's death. He had heard there were children, and consequently one of his great packing-cases contained many things which children would be likely to

value. It gave Gus pleasure to think of little sisters and brothers to whom he would be more like an uncle than a brother. He was fond of children, and he had a very comfortable simple confidence in himself. It had never occurred to him that they might not "get on." It was true that to hear of Paul gave him at first a certain twinge; but he thought it impossible, quite impossible, that Sir William could have let his son grow up to manhood without informing him of the circumstances. Surely it was impossible! There might be reasons why Lady Markham need not be told—it might make her jealous, it might be disappointing and vexatious to her—but he would not permit himself to believe that Paul had been left in ignorance. And Alice, who was grown up, it seemed certain to him that she, too, must know something. He had been greatly moved by the sight of Alice. The young ladies out in Barbadoes, he thought, were not like that, nor did he in Barbadoes see many young ladies; and this dainty, well-trained, well-bred English girl was a wonder and delight to him. Why should he not say that he was fond of Alice? It was not only natural, but desirable that he should be so. He walked out after Lady

Markham left him with a slight sense of discomfiture; he could not tell why, but yet a smile at the "flurry" into which she had allowed herself to be thrown. Women were subject to "flurries" for next to no cause, he was aware. It was foolish of her, but yet she was a woman to whom a good deal might be pardoned. And he did not feel angry, only astonished, and half discomfited, and a little amused. It was strange—he could not tell what she meant—but yet in time no doubt, all would be amicably settled, and they would "get on," however huffy she might be for the moment. Gus knew himself very well, and he knew that in general he was a person with whom it was easy to get on.

But he was a little disappointed to go away—after the hopes he had formed of being at once received into the bosom of the family, acknowledged by Sir William, and made known to the others—without any advance at all. He had spoken to Alice when he met her with the children, and had got "fond of her" on the spot: and he would have liked to have had her brought to him, and to have made himself known in his real character to all the girls and boys. But however, it

must all come right sooner or later, he said to himself; and no doubt Lady Markham, with her husband sick on her hands, and her son, as all the village believed, giving her a great deal of anxiety, might be forgiven if she could not take the trouble to occupy herself about anything else. Gus went away without meeting any one, and when he had got out in front of the house, turned round to look at it, as he was in the custom of doing It was a dull day, drizzly and overcast. This made the house look very like that woolly pencil-drawing, which had always hung at the head of his bed, and always been called home.

As he stood there some one came from behind the wing where the gate of the flower-garden was, and approached him slowly. Gus had not been quite able to make out who Fairfax was. He was "no relation," and there did not even seem to be any special understanding between him and Alice, which was the first idea that had come into the stranger's head. He had spoken to Fairfax two or three times when he had met him with the children, and Gus, who was full of the frankest and simplest curiosity, waited for him as soon as he perceived him. "We are going the same way, and I hope you

don't dislike company," he said. To tell the truth, Fairfax had no particular liking for company at that moment. It seemed to him that he was in a very awkward position in this house where dangerous sickness had come in and taken possession; but how to act, how to disembarrass them of his constant presence, without depriving them of his services, which, with natural self-regard he thought perhaps more valuable than they really were, he did not know. The quaint "little gentleman," about whom all the children chattered, seemed for the first moment somewhat of a bore to Fairfax; but after a moment's hesitation he accepted him with his usual good-nature, and joined him without any apparent reluctance. Mr. Gus was very glad of the opportunity of examining at his leisure this visitor whose connection with the family he did not understand.

"I have been asking for the old gentleman," he said. "I have seen Lady Markham. You know them a great deal better than I do, no doubt, though I am—a relation."

"I do not know them very well," said Fairfax. "Indeed, I find myself in a very awkward position. I came here by chance because Sir William fell ill when I was

with them, and I was of some use for the moment. That made me come on with them, without any intention of staying. And here I am, a stranger, or almost a stranger, in a house where there is dangerous illness. It is very embarrassing; I don't know what to do."

He had thought Gus a bore one minute, and the next opened all his mind to him. This was characteristic of the young man; but yet in his carelessness and easy impulse there was a certain sudden sense that the support of a third person somehow connected with the Markham family might give him some countenance.

"Then you don't know them—much?" said Mr. Gus, half-satisfied, half-contemptuous. "I couldn't make you out, to tell the truth. Nobody but an old friend or a connection—or some one who was likely to become a connection"—he added, giving Fairfax a keen sidelong glance, "seemed the right sort of person to be here."

Fairfax felt uneasy under that look. He blushed, he could scarcely tell why. "I can't be said to be more than a chance acquaintance," he said. "It was a lucky chance for me. I have known Markham for a long

time. I've known *him* pretty well; but it was a mere chance which brought Sir William to me when they were looking for Markham; and then, by another chance, I was calling when he was taken ill. That's all. I feel as if I were of a little use, and that makes me hesitate; but I know I have no right to be here."

"Who's Markham? The—son, I suppose?"

"Yes, the eldest son. I suppose you know him as Paul. Of course," said Fairfax, with hesitation, "he ought to be here; but there are some family misunderstandings. He doesn't know, of course, how serious it is."

"Wild?" said Mr. Gus, with his little, precise air.

"Oh—I don't quite know what you mean by wild. Viewy he is, certainly."

"Viewy? Now I don't know what you mean by viewy. It is not a word that has got as far as the tropics, I suppose."

Fairfax paused to give a look of increased interest at the "little gentleman." He began to be amused, and it was easy—very easy—to lead him from his own affairs into the consideration of some one else's. "Paul," he said—"I have got into the way of calling him Paul

since I have been here, as they all do—goes wrong by the head, not in any other way. We have been dabbling in—what shall I call it?—socialism, communism, in a way—the whole set of us: and he is more in earnest than the rest; he is giving himself up to it."

"Socialism—communism!" cried Mr. Gus; he was horrified in his simplicity. "Why that's revolution, that's bloodshed and murder!" he cried.

"Oh, no; we're not of the bloody kind—we're not red," said Fairfax, laughing. "It's the communism that is going to form an ideal society—not fire and flame and barricades."

"You don't mean to tell me," said Gus, not listening to this explanation, "that this young Markham—Paul, this Lady Markham's son—is one of those villains that want to assassinate all the kings, and plunge all Europe into trouble? Good God! what a lucky thing I came here!"

"No, no, I tell you," said Fairfax. "On the contrary, what Paul wants is to turn his back upon kings and aristocracies, to give up civilisation altogether, for that matter, and found a new world in the backwoods. We've all played with the notion. It sounds fine; and

then there's one eloquent fellow—a real orator, mind you—who makes it look like the grandest thing in the world to do. I believe he thinks it is, and so does Paul. He's gone wrong in his head on the subject; that is all that is wrong with him. But there is this difference," said Fairfax reflectively, "from going wrong that way and—other ways. If you prove yourself an ass in the common form, you're sorry and ashamed of yourself, and glad to make it up with your people at home; but when it's this sort of thing you stand on your high principles and will not give in. That's one difference between being viewy and—the other. Paul can't make up his mind to give in; and then probably he thinks they are making the very most of his father's illness in order to work upon his feelings. Well! he ought to know better," cried Fairfax, with a flush of indignation; "Lady Markham is not the sort of person to be suspected in that way; but you know the kind of ideas that are general. He makes himself fancy so, I suppose."

"He seems a nice sort of young fellow to come into this fine property," said Gus, with another sidelong, inquisitive look at Fairfax. There was an air of keen

curiosity, and at the same time of sarcastic enjoyment, on his face.

"That is the strange thing about it," said Fairfax reflectively stroking the visionary moustache which very lightly adorned his lip. "Paul is a very queer fellow. He is against the idea of property. He thinks it should all be re-divided and every man have his share. And, what's stranger still," he added, with an exclamation, "he's the fellow to do it if he had the chance. There is nothing sham about him. He would strip himself of everything as easily as I would throw off a coat."

"Against the idea of property!" said little Gus, with a very odd expression. He gave a long whistle of surprise and apparent discomfiture. "He must be a very queer fellow indeed," he said, with an air of something like disappointment. Why should he have been disappointed? But this was what no one, however intimately acquainted with the circumstances, could have told.

"Yes, he is a very queer fellow. He has a great deal in him. One thing that makes me a little uncomfortable," continued Fairfax, unconsciously falling more and

more into a confidential tone, "is that I don't know how he may take my being here."

"How should he take it? you are his friend, you said?"

"Ye-es; oh, we've always been very good friends, and one time and another have seen a great deal of each other. Still, you may like a fellow well enough among men, and not care to see him domesticated, you know, in your home. Besides, he might think I had put myself in the way on purpose to curry favour when Sir William was ill—or—I don't know what he might think. It seems shabby somehow to be living with your friend's people when your friend isn't there."

"Especially if he ought to be there, and you are doing his work."

"Perhaps," Fairfax said; and they walked down to the end of the avenue in silence. Mr. Gus had got a great deal to think of from this interview. A new light had come into his mind—and somehow, strangely, it was not at first an entirely agreeable light. He went along for some way without saying anything, going out of the great gates, and into the high road, which was so quiet. A country cart lumbering past now and then,

or a farmer's gig, the sharp trot of a horse carrying a groom from some other great house to inquire after Sir William, gave a little more movement to the rural stillness, increasing the cheerfulness, though the occasion was of the saddest; and as they approached the village, a woman came out from a cottage door, and, making her homely curtsey, asked the same question.

"My lady will be in a sad way," this humble inquirer said. It was of my lady more than of Sir William that the rustic neighbours thought.

"My lady's a great person hereabout," said Mr. Gus, with a look that was half spiteful. "I wonder how she will like it when the property goes away from her. She will not take it so easily as Paul."

"No," said Fairfax, rousing up in defence, "it is not likely she would take it easily; she has all her children to think of. It is to be hoped Paul will have sense enough to provide for the children before he lets it go out of his hands."

"Ah!" This again seemed to be a new light to Gus. "Your Lady Markham would have nothing to say to me," he said, after a pause. "She sent me off fast enough. She neither knows who I am, nor wants to

know. Perhaps it would be better both for her and the children if she had been a little more civil."

It was Fairfax's turn to look at him now, which he did with quite a new curiosity. He could not understand in what possible way it might be to Lady Markham's advantage to be civil to the little gentleman whom no one knew anything about; then it occurred to him suddenly that the uncles who appear mysteriously from far countries with heaps of money to bestow, and who present themselves *incognito* to test their families, are not strictly confined to novels and the stage. Now and then such a thing has happened, or has been said to happen, in real life. Could this be an instance? He was puzzled and he was amused by the idea. Mr. Gus did not look like the possessor of a colossal fortune looking for an heir; nor, though Lady Markham thought him nearly as old-looking as Sir William, did he seem to Fairfax old enough to adopt a simply beneficent *rôle*. Still, there seemed no other way to account for this half threat. It was all Fairfax could do to restrain his inclination to laugh; but he did so, and exerted himself at once to restore Lady Markham to his companion's good opinion.

"You must remember," he said—"and all we have been saying proves how much both you and I are convinced of it—that Sir William is very ill. His wife's mind is entirely occupied with him, and she is anxious about Paul. Indeed, can any one doubt that she has a great many anxieties very overwhelming to a woman who has been taken care of all her life? Fancy, should anything happen to Sir William, what a charge upon her shoulders! The wonder to me is that she can see any one; indeed she does not see any one. And if she does not know, as you say, who you are——"

"No," said Mr. Gus. Something which sounded half like a chuckle of satisfaction, and half a note of offence, was in his voice. He was like a mischievous school-boy delighted with the effect of a mystification, yet at the same time angry that he had not been found out. "She knows nothing about me," he said, with a half-laugh. Just then they had reached the Markham Arms, into which Fairfax followed him without thinking. They went into the little parlour, which was somewhat gloomy on this dull day, and green with the shadow of the honeysuckle which hung so delightfully over the window when the sun was shining, but darkened the room now

with its wreaths of obtrusive foliage, glistening in the soft summer drizzle. "Come in, come in," said Mr. Gus, pushing the chair, which was miscalled easy, towards his visitor, and shivering slightly; "nobody knows anything about me here: and if this is what you call summer, I wish I had never left Barbados. I can tell you, Mr. Fairfax, it was not a reception like this I looked for when I came here."

"Probably," said Fairfax, hitting the mark at a venture, "it is only Sir William himself who is acquainted with all the family relations—and as he is ill and disabled, of course he does not even know that you are here."

"He does know that I am here," cried the little gentleman, bursting with his grievance. It had come to that pitch that he could not keep silence any longer, and shut this all up in his own breast. "I wrote to let him know I had come. I should think he did know about his relations; and I—I can tell you, I'm a much nearer relation than any one here is aware."

Fairfax received this intimation quite calmly; he was not excited. Indeed it did not convey to him any kind of emotion. What did the matter? Uncle

or distant cousin, it was of very little consequence. He said, placidly—

"The village looks very pretty from this window. Are you comfortable here?"

"Comfortable!" echoed Gus. "Do you think I came all this way across the sea to shut myself up in a village public-house? I didn't even know what a village public-house was. I knew that house up there, and had known it all my life. I've got a drawing of it I'll show you, as like as anything ever was. Do you suppose I thought I would ever be sent away from there? I—oh, but you don't know, you can't suppose, how near a relation I am."

Fairfax thought the little man must be a monomaniac on this subject of his relationship to the Markhams. He thought it was but another instance of the wonderful way in which people worship family and descent. He himself having none of these things had marked often, with the keenness of a man who is beyond the temptation, the exaggerated importance which most people gave to them. Sir William Markham, it might be said, was a man whom it was worth while to be related to; but it did not matter what poor bit of a squire it was,

Fairfax thought; a man who could boast himself the cousin of Hodge of Claypits was socially a better man than the best man who was related to nobody. What a strange thing this kind of test was! To belong to a famous historical family, or to be connected with people of eminent acquirements, he could understand that there might be a pride in that; but the poorest little common-place family that had vegetated at one place for a century or two! He did not make any answer to Mr. Gus, but smiled at him, and yet compassionated him—this poor little fellow who had come over here from the tropics with his head full of the glory of the Markhams, and now had nothing better to do than to sit in this little inn parlour and brag of his relationship to them; it was very pitiful, and yet it was ludicrous too.

"I wonder," he said suddenly, "whether they could put me up here? I want to go, and yet I don't want to be away, if you can understand that. If anything were to happen, and Markham not here——"

"I should be here," said Gus. "I tell you you haven't the least idea how near a relation I am. Lady Markham may be as high and mighty as she likes, but

it would be better for her if she were a little civil. She doesn't know the power that a man may have whom she chooses to slight. And I can tell you my papers are all in order. There are no registers wanting or certificates, or anything to be put a question upon; uncle took care of that. Though he adopted me, and had the intention of making me his heir (if he had left anything to be heir to), he always took the greatest care of all my papers. And he used to say to me, 'Look here, Gus, if anything should happen to me, here's what will set you up, my boy.' I never thought much about it so long as he was living, I thought things were going better than they were; and when the smash came I took a little time to pick myself up. Then I thought I'd do what he always advised—I'd come home. But if any one had told me I was to be living here, in a bit of a tavern, and nobody knowing who I am, I should not have believed a word."

"It is very unfortunate," said Fairfax; "but of course it is because of Sir William's illness—that could not have been foreseen."

"No, to be sure it could not have been foreseen," Gus said; then roused himself again in the might of

his injury. "But if you could guess, if you could so much as imagine, who I really am—— "

Fairfax looked at him with curiosity. It was strange to see the vehemence in his face: but Gus was now carried beyond self-control. He could not help letting himself out, getting the relief of disclosure. He leant across the little shining mahogany table and whispered a few words into Fairfax's ear.

CHAPTER XIII.

"WHAT does the doctor say?"

"Oh, Mr. Fairfax! worse, far worse than nothing! He looks at us as if his heart would break. He has known us all our lives. He steals out through the garden not to see me. But I know what he means, I know very well what he means," Alice said with irrestrainable tears.

"But the other one from London—Sir Thomas: he is coming?"

"This afternoon: but it will not do any good. Mr. Fairfax, will you telegraph once more to Paul? I don't think he believes us. Tell him that papa——"

"Don't say any more, Miss Markham; I understand. But one moment," said Fairfax; "Paul will not like to find me here. No, there is no reason why—we have

never quarrelled. But he will not like to find me here."

"You have been very kind, very good to us, Mr. Fairfax; you have stayed and helped us when there was no one else; you have always been a—comfort. But then it must have been very, very dismal and gloomy for you to be in a house where there was nothing but trouble," Alice said.

Her pretty eyes were swimming in tears. It gave her a little pang to think that perhaps this visitor, though he had been so kind, had been staying out of mere civility, and thinking it hard. It was not out of any other feeling in her mind that she was aware of; but to think that Fairfax had been longing to get away perhaps, feeling the tedium of his stay, gave her a sharp little shock of pain.

"Do not speak so—pray do not speak so," said Fairfax, distressed. "That is not the reason. But I think I will go to the village. There I can be at hand whatever is wanted. You will know that I am ready by night or day—but I have no right to be here."

Alice looked at him, scarcely seeing him through the great tears with which her eyes were brimming over.

She put out her hand with a tremulous gesture of appeal.

"Then you think," she said, in a voice which was scarcely louder than a whisper, "you think—it is very near?"

Fairfax felt that he could not explain himself. In the very presence of death could any one pause to think that Paul might find a visitor intrusive, or that the visitor himself might be conscious of a false position?

"No," he said, "no: how can I tell? I have not seen him. I could not be a judge. It is on Paul's account; but I shall be at the village—always at hand whatever you may want."

This reassured her a little, and the glimmer of a feeble smile came on her face. She gave him her trembling hand for a moment. He had been very "kind." It was not a word that expressed his devotion, but Alice did not know what other to use: very—very kind.

"The house will seem more empty still if you go. It looks so lonely," said Alice; "like what it used to be when they were away in town and we left behind.

Oh, if that were all! Paul ought to have been here all the time, and you have taken his place. It is unjust that you should go when he comes."

"I shall not go," said Fairfax softly. He had held her hand in his for a moment—only for a moment. Alice, in her grief, was soothed by his sympathy; but Fairfax, on the other hand, was very well aware that he must take no advantage of that sympathy. He would have liked to kiss the trembling hand in an effusion of tender pity, and if it had been Lady Markham he might have done so; but it was Alice, and he dared not. He held himself aloof by main strength, keeping himself from even a word more. There was almost a little chill in it to the girl, whose heart was full of trouble and pain, and whose tearful eyes appealed unconsciously to that "kindness" in which she had such confidence. To be deserted by any one at such a moment would have seemed hard to her. The house was oppressed by the slow rolling-up of this cloud, which was about to overcloud all their life.

Lady Markham now scarcely left the sick-room at all. When they warned her that she would exhaust herself, that she would not be able to bear the strain, she would

shake her head with a woeful sort of smile. She was not of the kind that breaks down. She was sure of herself so long as she should be wanted, and afterwards, what did it matter? Now and then she would come out and take a turn or two along the corridor, rather because of the restlessness of anguish that would take possession of her than from any desire to "change the air," as the nurse said. And when she was out of the room Sir William's worn eyes would watch the door. "Don't leave me alone," he said to her in his feeble voice. He had grown very feeble now. For by far the greater part of the time he was occupied entirely with his bodily sufferings; but now and then it would occur to him that there was something in his pocket-book, something that would give a great deal of trouble—and that there was somebody who wanted to see him and to force an explanation. How was he able in his weak state, to give any explanation? He had entreated his wife at first not to allow him to be disturbed, and now as everything grew dimmer, he could not bear that she should leave him. There was protection in her presence. At times it occurred to him that his enemy was lurking outside, and that all his attendants could

do was to keep the intruder at bay. Now and then he would hear a step in the corridor, which no doubt was his; but the nurses were all faithful, and the dangerous visitor was never let in. At these moments Sir William turned his feeble head to look for his wife. She would protect him. As he went further and further, deeper and deeper, into the valley of the shadow, he forgot even what the danger was; but the idea haunted him still. All this time he had never asked for Paul. He had not wished to see any one, only to have his room well watched and guarded, and nobody allowed to disturb him. When the doctors came there was always a thrill of alarm in his mind—not for his own condition, as might have been supposed, but lest in their train or under some disguise the man who was his enemy might get admission. And thus, without any alarm in respect to himself, without any personal uneasiness about what was coming, he descended gradually the fatal slope. The thought of death never occurred to him at all. No solemn alarm was his, not even any consciousness of what might be coming. He never breathed a word as to what he wished to be done, or gave any directions. In short, he did not apparently think much of his

illness. The idea of a dangerous and disagreeable visitor who would go away again if no notice was taken of him, and of whom it was expedient to take no notice, was the master idea in his mind, and with all the strength he had he kept this danger secret—it was all the exertion of which he was now capable.

And to be a visitor in the house at such a melancholy moment was most embarrassing. There are some people who have a special knack of mixing themselves up in the affairs of others, and Fairfax was one of these. He was himself strangely isolated and alone in the world, and it seemed to him that he had never found so much interest in anything as in this family story into the midst of which he had been so suddenly thrown. Almost before he had become acquainted with them, circumstances had made him useful, and for the moment necessary, to them. He was an intruder, yet he was doing the work of a son. And then in those long summer evenings which Lady Markham spent in her husband's sickroom, what a strange charmed life the young man had drifted into! When the children went to bed, Alice would leave the great drawing-room blazing with lights, for that smaller room at the end

which was Lady Markham's sanctuary, and which was scarcely lighted at all, and there the two young people would sit alone, waiting for Lady Markham's appearance or for news from the sick-room, with only one dim lamp burning, and the summer moonlight coming in through the little golden-tinted panes of the great Elizabethan window. Sometimes they scarcely said anything to each other, the anxiety which was the very atmosphere of the house hushing them into watchfulness and listening which forbade speech; but sometimes, on the other hand, they would talk in half-whispers, making to each other without knowing it, many disclosures both of their young lives and characters, which advanced them altogether beyond that knowledge of each other which ordinary acquaintances possess.

Nothing like love, it need not be said, was in those bits of intercourse, broken sometimes by a hasty summons from the sick-room to Alice, or a hurried commission to Fairfax—a telegram that had to be answered, or something that it was necessary to explain to the doctor. In the intervals of these duties, which seemed as natural to the one as to the other, the girl and the young man would talk or would be silent,

somehow pleased and soothed mutually by each other's presence, though neither was conscious of thinking of the other. Alice at least was not conscious. She felt that it was "a comfort" that he should be there, so sympathetic, so kind, ready to go anywhere at a moment's notice; and she had come to be able to say to him "Go" or "Come" without hesitation, and to take for granted his willing service. But it was scarcely to be expected that Fairfax should be unconscious of the strangeness of the union which was invisibly forming itself between them. At first a certain amusement had mixed with the natural surprise of suddenly finding himself in circumstances so strange; but it must be allowed that by degrees Fairfax came to think Sir William's illness a fortunate chance, and so long as imminent danger was not thought of, had no objection to its continuance.

But things had become more grave from day to day. Sir William, without doubt, seemed going to die, and Paul did not come, and the stranger's services became more and more necessary, yet more and more incongruous with the circumstances of the house. The whole came to a climax when Gus whispered that revelation

across the table in the inn parlour. The excitement and distress with which Fairfax received it is not to be described. Could it be true? Certainly Gus was absolutely convinced of its truth, and unaware of any possibility of denial. Fairfax asked himself, with a perplexity more serious than he had ever known in his life before, what he ought to do. Was it his duty to say something or to say nothing? to warn them of the extraordinary blow that was coming, or to hold his peace and merely look on? When he went back up the peaceful avenue into the house which he was beginning to call home—the house over which one dread cloud was hanging, but which had no prevision of the other calamity—he felt as if he himself were a traitor conniving at its destruction. But to whom could he speak? Not to Lady Markham who had so much to bear—and Alice—to tell such a tale to Alice was impossible. It was then that he determined at any cost that Paul must come, and he himself go away. That Paul would not tolerate his presence in the house he was aware, instinctively feeling that neither could he, in Paul's place, have borne it. And to go away was not so easy as it once might have been; but there

seemed no longer any question what his duty was. He put up some of his things in a bag, and himself carried them with him down the avenue, not able to feel otherwise than sadly heavy and sore about the heart. He could not abandon the ladies; but he could not stay there any longer with that secret in his possession. His telegram to Paul was in a different tone from those which the ladies sent.

"The doctors give scarcely any hope," he said. "Come instantly. I cannot but feel myself an intruder at such a moment; but I will not leave till you come."

Then he went sadly with his bag to the Markham Arms. Was it right? Was it wrong? It even glanced across his mind that to establish himself there by the side of Gus might seem to the Markhams like taking their enemy's side against them. But what else could he do? He would neither intrude upon them nor abandon them.

Fairfax calculated justly. Paul, who had resisted his mother's appeals and his sister's entreaties, obeyed at once the imperative message of the man who threw the light of outside opinion and common necessity upon the situation. He arrived that night, just after the great

London physician, who had come down to pronounce upon Sir William's condition, had been driven to the railway. Paul had no carriage sent for him, and had said to himself that it was all an exaggeration and piece of folly, since some one from Markham was evidently dining out. There were, however, all the signs of melancholy excitement which usually follow such a visit visible in the hall and about the house when he reached it. Brown and one of his subordinates were standing talking in low tones on the great steps, shaking their heads as they conversed. Mr. Brown himself had managed to change his usually cheerful countenance into the semblance of that which is characteristic of an undertaker's mute.

"I knew how it would be the moment I set eyes upon him," Mr. Brown was saying. "Death was in his face, if it ever was in a man's."

Paul sprang from the lumbering old fly which he had found at the station with a mixture of eagerness and incredulity.

"How is my father?" he said.

"Oh, sir, you're come none too soon," said Brown, "Sir William is as bad as bad can be." And then Alice,

hearing something, she did not know what, rushed out. Every sound was full of terror in the oppressed house. She flung herself upon her brother and wept. There was no need to say anything; and Paul who had been lingering, thinking they did not mean what they said, believing it to be a device to get him seduced into that dangerous stronghold of his enemy's house, was overcome too.

"Why did not I hear before?" he said. But nobody bid him remember that he had been told a dozen times before.

Sir William was very ill that night. He began to wander, and said things in his confused and broken utterance which were very mysterious to the listeners. But as none of them had any clue to what these wanderings meant, they did not add, as they might have done, to the misery of the night. There was no rest for any one during those tedious hours. The children and the inferior servants went to bed as usual, but the elder ones, and those domestics who had been long in the family, could not rest any more than could those individually concerned; the excitement of that gloomy expectation got into their veins. Mrs. Fry was up and down

all night, and Brown lay on a sofa in the housekeeper's room, from which he appeared at intervals looking very wretched and troubled, with that air of half-fearing half hoping the worst, which gets into the faces of those who stand about the outer chamber where death has shown his face. Nothing however "happened" that night. The day began again, and life, galvanised into a haggard copy of itself, with all the meals put upon the table as usual. The chief figure in this new day, in this renewed vigil, was Paul, who, always important in the house, was now doubly important as so soon to be master of all. The servants were all very careful of him that he should not be troubled; messages and commissions which the day before would have been handed unceremoniously to Fairfax, were now managed by Brown himself as best he could rather than trouble Mr. Paul; and even Mrs. Fry was more anxious that he should lie down and rest, than even that Alice, her favourite, should be spared.

"It will all come upon him *after*," the housekeeper said.

As for Paul himself, the effect upon him was very great. Perhaps it was because of the profound dissatisfaction

in his mind with all his own plans, that he had so long resisted the call to come home. Since his father had left Oxford, Paul had gone through many chapters of experience. Every day had made him more discontented with his future associates, more secretly appalled by the idea that the rest of his life was to be spent entirely among them. He had left his rooms in college, and gone into some very homely ones not far from Spears's, by way of accustoming himself to his new life. This was a thing he had long intended to do, and he had been angry with himself for his weak-minded regard for personal comfort, but unfortunately his enthusiasm had begun to sink into disgust before he took this step, and his loathing for the little mean rooms, the narrow street full of crowding children and evil odours was intense. That he had forced himself to remain, notwithstanding this loathing, was perhaps all the worse for his plans. He would not yield to his own disgust, but it inspired him with a secret horror and opposition far more important than this mere dislike of his surroundings. He saw that none of the others minded those things, which made his existence miserable. Even Spears, whose perceptions in some respects were delicate, did not

smell the smell, nor perceive the squalor. He thought Paul's new lodgings very handsome; he called him Paul, without any longer even the apologetic smile which at first accompanied that familiarity, as a matter of course. And Janet gave him no peace. She called him out with little beckonings and signs. She was always in the way when he came or went. She took the charge of him, telling him what he ought to do and what not to do, with an attempt at that petty tyranny which a woman who is loved may exercise with impunity, but which becomes intolerable in any other.

It was thus with a kind of fierce determination to remain faithful to his convictions that Paul had set himself like a rock against all the appeals from home. His convictions! These convictions gradually resolved themselves into a conviction of the utter unendurableness of life, under the conditions which he had chosen, as day by day went on. Nothing, he had resolved, should make him yield, or own himself mistaken—nothing would induce him to give up the cause to which he had pledged himself. But now that at last he had been driven out of that stronghold, and forced to leave the surroundings he hated, and come back to those that

were natural to him, Paul's mind was in a chaos indescribable. After the first burst of penitence and remorse, there had stolen on him a sense of well-being, a charm of association which he strove to struggle against, but in vain. He was grieved, deeply grieved for his father; but is it possible that in the mind of a young heir, aware of all the incalculable differences in his own life which the end of his father's must make, there should not be a quivering excitement of the future mingling with the sorrow of the present, however sincere? When he went out in the morning, after the feverishness of that agitated night, to feel the fresh air in his face, and saw around him all the spreading woods, all the wealthy and noble grace of the old house which an hour or moment, might make his own, a strange convulsion shook his being. Was not he pledged to give all up, to relinquish everything—to share whatever he had with his brother, and, leave all belonging to him? The question brought a deadly faintness over him. While he stood under the trees looking at his home, he seemed to see the keen eyes of the Scotsman, Fraser, inspecting the place, and Short jotting down calculations on a bit of paper as to what would be the value of the materials, and how

many villas semi-detached might be built on the site —while Spears, perhaps, patted him on the shoulder, and bid him remember that even if he had not given it up, this could not have lasted,—"the country would not stand it long." He seemed to see and hear them discussing his fate; and Janet, standing at the door, making signs to him with her hand. What had he to do here? It was to that society he belonged. Nevertheless, Paul's heart quivered with a strange excitement when he thought that to-morrow—perhaps this very night!—And then he bethought himself of the darkened room upstairs, and his mother's lingering watch; and his heart contracted with a sudden pang.

Next evening it was apparent that the end was at hand. Just as the sun went down, when the soft greyness of the summer twilight began to steal into the air, the children were sent for into Sir William's room. They thronged in with pale faces and wide open eyes, having been bidden not to cry—not to disturb the quiet of the death chamber. The windows were all open, the sky appearing in wistful stretches of clearness; but near the bed, in the shadow, a shaded lamp burned solemnly, and the window beyond showed gleams of

lurid colour in the western sky, barred by strong black lines of cloud. These black lines of cloud, and the mysterious shining of the lamp, gave a strange air of solemnity to the room, all filled already by the awe and wonder of death. A sob of mingled grief and terror burst from little Marie, as grasping her sister's hand convulsively, she followed Alice to her father's bedside. Was it he that lay there, propped up with cushions, breathing so hard and painfully? The boys stood at the foot of the bed. Their hearts were full of that dreary anguish of the unaccustomed and unknown, which gives additional depth to every sorrow of early youth. Alice, who had taken her place close to the head of the bed had lost this. She knew all about it, poor child—what to do for him; what was coming; all that should be administered to him. She was as pale as those pale stretches of sky, and like them in the clear pathetic wistfulness of her face; but she had something to do, and she was not afraid.

"William—are you able to say anything to the children?" said Lady Markham. "They have all come —to see you—to ask how you are——" She could not say, "to bid you farewell;" that was not possible.

Her voice was quite steady and calm. The time was coming when she would be able to weep, but not now.

He opened his eyes and looked at them with a faint smile He had always been good to the children. At his most busy moment they had never been afraid of him. Little Bell held her breath, opening her eyes wider and wider to keep down that passion of tears which was coming, while Marie clung to her, trying to imitate her, but with the tears already come, and making blinding reflections of the solemn lamp and the evening light.

"Ah, yes, the children," Sir William said. "I have not seen them since Sunday. They have been very good—and kind; they have not—made any noise. Who is that? I thought—I heard—some one—"

"Nobody, papa," said Alice—"nobody—except all of us."

"Ah! all of you," he said, and gave one of those panting, hard-drawn breaths which were so terrible to hear.

The door was open, like the windows, to give all the air possible. The servants were standing about the

stairs and in the passages. Everybody knew that the last act was about to be performed solemnly, and the master of the house on the eve of his going away. Most of the women were crying, Even when it is nothing to you, what event is there that can be so much as this final going—this departure into the unseen? There was a general hush of awe and excitement. And how it was that amidst them all that stranger managed to get entrance, to walk up stairs, to thread through the mournful group, no one ever knew. His step was audible, even among that agitated company, as he came along the corridor. They all heard it, with a certain sense of alarm. Was it the doctor coming back again with something new he had thought of, or was it——

"Ah, all of you," Sir William said; and as he spoke the words the new-comer came in at the door. He walked up to the foot of the bed, no one molesting him. They were all struck dumb with surprise; and what could they have done, when a momentary tumult or scuffle would have killed the sufferer at once? For the moment every eye was turned from Sir William, and directed to Mr. Gus in his light clothes, with his little

brown face, so distinct from all the others. He came up close to the foot of the bed.

"Yes, all of us, now I am here," he said. "I am sorry to disturb you at such a time; but, Sir William Markham, you'll have to own me before you die."

Paul made a hasty step towards him, and put a hand upon his shoulder.

"Don't you see," he said. "Go away, for God's sake. Whatever you want I'll attend to you after."

"I'll not go away," said Gus. "I must stand for my rights, even if he is dying. Sir William Markham, it's your own doing. I have given you warning. You'll have to own me before you die."

Paul, beside himself, seized the stranger by the shoulders; but Gus, though he was small, was strong.

"Don't make a scuffle," he said in a low tone; "I won't go, but I'll make no disturbance. He's going to speak. Be still, you, and listen to what he says."

Sir William signed impatiently to his attendants on each side—Alice and her mother—to raise him. He looked round him, feebly peering into the waning light.

"They are beginning to fight—over my bed," he said, with a quiver in his voice.

"No," said Gus, getting free from Paul's restraining grasp. He made no noise, but he was supple and strong, and slid out of the other's hands. "No, there shall be no fighting; I have more respect—but own me, father, before you die. I'll take care of them. I'll do no one any harm, I swear before God; but own me before you die."

They all stood and listened, gazing, forgetting even the man who was dying. The very children forgot him, and turned to the well-known countenance of the little gentleman. Then there came a gasp, a sob, a great quiver in the bed. Sir William flung out his emaciated arms with a gesture of despair.

"I said I was not to be disturbed," he said, and fell back, never to be disturbed any more.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE news of Sir William Markham's death made a great sensation in the neighbourhood. It was as if a great house had fallen to the ground, a great tree been riven up by the roots. There are some people whom no one expects ever to die, and he was one of them. There seemed so much for him to do in the world. He was so full of occupation, so well qualified to do it, so precise and orderly in all his ways, every moment of his time filled up, he did not seem to have leisure for all the troublesome preliminaries of dying. But as it happened, he had found the time for them, as we all do, and everybody was astonished. It was whispered in the county that there had been "a very strange scene at the death-bed," and everybody concluded that this was somehow connected with the heir, it being well known that Paul

had only appeared the day before his father's death. Some vague rumours on this score flew about in the days which elapsed before the funeral, but nobody could tell the rights of the story, and it had already begun to to fade before the great pomp and ceremonial of the funeral day. This was to be a very great day at Markham Royal. In the Markham Arms all the stables were getting cleared out, in preparation for the horses of the gentry who would collect from far and near to pay honour to the last scene in which the member for the county would ever play any part; and all the village was roused in expectation. No doubt it was a very solemn and sad ceremonial, and Markham Royal knew that it had lost its best friend; but, notwithstanding, any kind of excitement is pleasant in the country, and they liked this well enough in default of better. The little gentleman too, who was living at the Markham Arms, was a great diversion to the village. He gave himself the air of superintending everything that was done at the Markham burying place. He went about it solemnly —as if it could by any possibility be his business—and he put on all the semblance of one who has lost a near relation. He put away his light clothes, and appeared

in black, with a hat-band which almost covered his tall hat. The village people felt it very natural that the little gentleman should be proud of his relationship to the Markhams, and should take such a good opportunity of showing it; but those who knew about such matters laughed a little at the size of his hatband. "If he had been a son it could not have been larger. Sir Paul himself could not do more," Mr. Remnant, the draper, said.

It happened that Dolly Stainforth was early astir on the funeral morning. She thought it right to get all her parish work over at an early hour, for the village would be full of "company," and indeed Dolly was aware that even in the rectory itself there would be a great many people to luncheon, and that her father's stables would be as full of horses as those of the Markham Arms. She was full of excitement and grief herself, partly for Sir William whom she had known all her life, but still more for Alice and Lady Markham, for whom the girl grieved as if their grief had been her own. She had put on a black frock to be so far in sympathy with her friends, and before the dew was off the flowers, had gathered all she could find in the rectory garden, and

made them into wreaths and crosses. This is an occupation which soothes the sympathetic mourner. She stood under the shadow of a little *bosquet* on the slope of the rectory garden which looked towards the churchyard, and worked silently at this labour of love, a tear now and then falling upon the roses still wet with morning dew. From where she stood she could see the preparations in the great Markham burying place, the sexton superintending the place prepared in which Sir William was to lie with his father, the lych-gate under which the procession would pause as they entered, and the path by which they would sweep round to the church. That which was about to happen so soon seemed already to be happening before her eyes. The tears streamed down Dolly's fresh morning cheeks. To die, to be put away under the cold turf, to leave the warm precints of the cheerful day, seems terrible indeed to a creature so young as she was, so full of life, and on a summer morning all brimming over with melody and beauty. When she shook the tears off her eyelashes she saw a solitary figure coming through the churchyard, pausing for a moment to look at the grave, then turning towards the gate which led into the rectory

garden. Dolly put the wreath she was making on her arm, and hastened to meet him. Her heart beat; it was full of sorrow and pity, and yet of excitement too. She went to him with the tears once more streaming from her pretty eyes. "Oh Paul!" she said, putting her hand into his, and able to say no more. Of late she had begun to call him Mr. Markham, feeling shy of her old playfellow and of herself, but she could not stand upon her dignity now. She would have liked to throw her arms round his neck, to console him, to have called him dear Paul. In his trouble it seemed impossible to do too much for him. And Paul on his side took the little hand in both his, and held it fast. The tears rose to his eyes too. He was very grown up, very tall and solemn, and his mind was full of many a serious thought—but when he had little Dolly by the hand the softest influence of which he was susceptible came over him. "Thank you, Dolly," he said, with quivering lips.

"How are they?" said the little girl, coming very close to his side, and looking up at him with her wet eyes.

"Oh, how can they be?" said Paul; "my mother is

worn out, she cannot feel it yet: and Alice is with her night and day."

"Will they come?" said Dolly, with a sob in her voice.

"I fear so; it is too much for them. But I am afraid they will come, whatever I may say."

"Oh, don't you think it is best? Then they will feel that they have not left him, not for a moment, nor failed him, as long as there was anything to do."

"But that makes it all the worse when there is nothing to do. I fear for my mother."

"She has got you, Paul—and the children."

"Yes, me; and I did not come till the last. Did you hear that, Dolly?—that I wasted all the time when he was dying, and was only here the last day?"

"Dear Paul," said Dolly, giving him her hand again, "you did not mean it. Do you think he does not know now? Oh, you may be sure he understands!" she cried, with that confidence in the advancement of the dead above all petty frailties which is so touching and so universal.

"I hope so," Paul said, with quivering lips; and as he stood here, with this soft hand clasping his, and this

familiar, almost childish, voice consoling him, Paul felt as if he had awakened out of a dream. This was the place he belonged to, not the squalid dream to which he had given himself. Standing under those beautiful trees, with this soft, fair innocent creature comprehending and consoling him, there suddenly flashed before his eyes a vision of a narrow street, the lamp-post, the children shouting and fighting, and another creature, who did not at all understand him, standing close by him, pressing her advice upon him, looking up at him with eager eyes. A sudden horror seized him even while he felt the softness of Dolly's consoling touch and voice. It quickened the beating of his heart and brought a faintness of terror like a film over his eyes.

"Come and sit down," said Dolly, alarmed. "You are so pale. Oh, Paul, sit down, and I will run and bring you something. You have been shutting yourself up too much; you have been making yourself ill. Oh, Paul! you must not reproach yourself. You must remember how much there is to do."

"Do not leave me, Dolly. I am going to speak to the rector. I am not ill—it was only a sudden

recollection that came over me. I have not been so good a son as I ought to have been."

"Oh, Paul! he sees now—he sees that you never meant it," Dolly said. "Do you think *they* are like us, thinking only of the outside? And you have your mother to think of now."

"And so I will," he said, with a softening rush of tears to his eyes. "Come in with me, Dolly."

Dolly was used to comforting people who were in trouble. She did not take away her hand, but went in with him very quietly, like a child, leading the young man who was so deeply moved. Her own heart was in a great flutter and commotion, but she kept very still, and led him to her father's study and opened the door for him. "Here is Paul, papa," she said, as if Paul had been a boy again, coming with an exercise, or to be scolded for some folly he had done. But afterwards Dolly went back to her wreaths with her heart beating very wildly. She was ashamed and angry with herself that it should be so on such a day—the morning of the funeral. But then it is so in nature, let us chide as we will. One day ends weeping, and the next thrusts its recollection away with sunshine. Already the new

springs of life were beginning to burst forth from the very edges of the grave.

When Paul went away after this last bit of melancholy business (he had come to tell the rector what the hymn was which his mother wished to be sung) he did not see Dolly again. She was putting all her flowers ready with which to cover the darkness of the coffin—a tender expedient which has everywhere suggested itself to humanity. He went away through the early sunshine, walking with a subdued and measured tread as a man enters a church not to disturb the worshippers. In Paul's own mind there was a feeling like that of convalescence—the sense of something painful behind yet hopeful before—the faintness and weakness, yet renewal of life, which comes after an illness. There was no anguish in his grief, nor had there been after the first agony of self-reproach which he had experienced, when he perceived the cruelty of his lingering and reluctance to obey his mother's call. But that was over. He had at least done his duty at the last, and now the feeling in Paul's mind was more that of respectful compassion for his father now withdrawn out of all the happiness of his life, than of any sorer, more personal sentiment.

The loss of him was not a thing against which his son's whole soul cried out as darkening heaven and earth to himself. The loss of a child has this effect upon a parent, but that of a parent seldom so affects a child; yet he was sorry, with almost a compunctious sense of the happiness of living, for his father who had lost that—who had been obliged to give up wife and children, and his happy domestic life, and his property and influence, and the beautiful world and the daylight. At this thought his heart bled for Sir William; yet for himself beat softly with a sense of unbounded opening and expansion and new possibility. As he walked softly home, his step instinctively so sobered and gentle, his demeanour so subdued, the thoughts that possessed him were such as he had never experienced before. They possessed him indeed; they were not voluntary, not originated by any will of his, but swept through him as on the wings of the wind, or gently floated into him, filling every nook and corner. He was no longer the same being; the moody, viewy, rebellious young man who was about to emigrate with Spears, to join a little rude community of colonists and work with his hands for his daily bread and sacrifice all his better

knowledge, all the culture of a higher social caste, to rough equality and primitive justice—had died with Sir William. All that seemed to be years behind him. Sometimes his late associates appeared to him as if in a dream, as the discomforts of a past journey or the perils that we have overcome, flash upon us in sudden pictures. He saw Spears and Fraser and the rest for a moment gleaming out of the darkness, as he might have seen a precipice in the Alps on the edge of which for a moment he had hung. It was not that he had given them up; it was that in a moment they had become impossible. He walked on, subdued, in his strange convalescence, with a kind of content and resignation and sense of submission. A man newly out of a fever, submits sweetly to all the immediate restraints that suit his weakness. He does not insist upon exercises or indulgences of which he feels incapable, but recognises with a grateful sense of trouble over, the duty of submitting. This was how Paul felt. He was not glad, but there was in his veins a curious elation, expansion, a rising tide of new life. He had to cross the village street on his way home, and there all the people he met took off their hats or made their curtseys with a

reverential respect that arose half out of respect for his new dignities, and half out of sympathy for the son who had lost his father. Just when his mind was soft and tender with the sight of this universal homage, there came up to him a strange little figure, all in solemn black.

"You are going home," said this unknown being. "I will walk with you and talk it over; and let us try if we cannot arrive at an understanding——"

Paul put up his hand with sudden impatience. "I can't speak to you to-day," he said hastily.

"Not to-day? the day of our father's funeral; that ought to be the most suitable day of all—and indeed it must be," the little gentleman said.

"Mr. Gaveston," said Paul, "if that is your name——"

"No, it is not my name," said Mr. Gus.

"I suppose you lay claim to ours, then? You have no right. But Mr. Markham Gaveston, or whatever you call yourself, you ought to see that this is not the moment. I will not refuse to examine your claims at a more appropriate time," said Paul with lofty distance.

A slight redness came over Gus's brown face. He laughed angrily. "Yes, you will have to consider my

claims," he said. And then after a little hesitation, he went away. This disturbed the current of Paul's languid, yet intense, consciousness. He felt a horror of the man who had thus, he thought, intruded the recollection of his father's early errors to cloud the perfect honour and regret with which he was to be carried to his grave. The interruption hurt and wounded him. Of course the fellow would have to be silenced—bought off at almost any price—rather than communicate to the world this stigma upon the dead. By and by, however, as he went on, the harshness of this jarring note floated away in the intense calm and peace of the sweet atmosphere of the morning which surrounded him. The country was more hushed than usual, as if in sympathy with what was to happen to-day. The very birds stirred softly among the trees, giving place, it might have been supposed, to that plaintive coo of the wood pigeon "moaning for its mate" which is the very voice of the woods. A soft awe seemed over all the earth—an awe that to the young man seemed to concern as much his own life which was, as the other which was ending. The same awe crept into his own heart as he went towards his home, that temple of grief and mourning,

from which all the sunshine was shut out. There seemed to rise up within him a sudden sense of the responsibilities of the future, a sudden warmth of resolution which brought the tears to his eyes.

"I will be good," said the little princess, when she heard of the great kingdom that was coming to her; and Paul, though he was not a child to use that simple phraseology, felt the same. The follies of the past were all departed like clouds. He was the head of the family —the universal guardian. It lay with him to see that all were cared for, all kept from evil; the fortune of many was in his hands; power had come to him—real power, not visionary uncertain influence such as he had once thought the highest of possibilities. "I will be good" —this thought swelled up within him, filling his heart.

It was past mid-day when the procession set out; the whole county had come from all its corners, to do honour to Sir William, and the parish sent forth a humble audience, scattered along all the roads, half-sad, half-amused by the sight of all the carriages and the company. When they caught a glimpse of my lady in her deep crape, the women cried: but dried their tears to count the number of those who followed, and felt a

vague gratification in the honour done to the family. All the men who were employed on the estate, and the farmers, and even many people from Farboro', the market-town, swelled the procession. Such a great funeral had never been seen in the district. Lady Westland and her daughter, and Mrs. Booth, and the other ladies in the parish, assembled under the rectory trees, and watched the wonderful procession, not without much remark on the fact that Dolly had gone to the grave with the family, a thing which no one else had been asked to do. It was not the ladies on the lawn, however, who remarked the strange occurrence which surprised the lookers-on below, and which was so soon made comprehensible by what followed. When the procession left the church-door, the stranger who was living at the Markham Arms appeared all of a sudden, in the old-fashioned scarves and hat-bands of the deepest conventional woe, and placed himself behind the coffin, in a line with, or indeed a little in advance of, Paul. There was a great flutter among the professional conductors of the ceremony when this was observed. One of the attendants rushed to him, and took him by the arm, and remonstrated with anxious whispers.

"You can follow behind, my good gentleman—you can follow behind," the undertaker said; "but this is the chief mourner's place."

"It is my place," said the intruder aloud, "and I mean to keep it."

"Oh, don't you now, sir—don't you now make a business," cried the distressed official. "Keep out of Sir Paul's way!"

The stranger shook the man off with a sardonic grin which almost sent him into a fit, so appalling was it, and contrary to all the decorum of the occasion. And what more could any one do? They kept him out of the line of the procession, but they could not prevent him from keeping up with, keeping close by Paul's side. Indeed Mr. Gus got close to the side of the grave, and made the responses louder than any one else, as if he were indeed the chief actor in the scene. And his appearance in all those trappings of woe, which no one else wore, pointed him doubly out to public notice. Indeed the undertaker approved of him for that; it was shewing a right feeling—even though it was not from himself that Mr. Gus had procured that livery of mourning. It was he that lingered the longest when the

mourners dispersed. This incident was very much discussed and talked of in the parish and among the gentlemen who had attended the funeral, during the rest of the day. But the wonder which it excited was light and trivial indeed in comparison with the wonders that were soon to follow. All day long the roads were almost gay (if it had not been wrong to use such an expression in the circumstances) with the carriages returning from the funeral, and the people in the road-side cottages felt themselves at liberty to enjoy the sight of them now that all was over, and Sir William safely laid in his last bed.

"And here's Sir Paul's 'ealth," was a toast that was many times repeated in the Markham Arms, and in all the little alehouses where the thirsty mourners refreshed themselves during the day; "and if he's as good a landlord and as good a master as his father, there won't be much to say again' him."

There were many, however, who, remembering all that had been said about him, the "bad company" he kept, and his long absences from home, shook their heads when they uttered their good wishes, and had no confidence in Sir Paul.

CHAPTER XV.

THE house had fallen into quiet after the gloomy excitement of the morning. All the guests save two or three had gone away, the shutters were opened, the rooms full once more of soft day-light, bright and warm. The event, great and terrible as it was, was over, and ordinary life again begun.

But there was still one piece of business to do. Sir William's will had to be read before the usual routine of existence could be begun again. This grand winding up of the affairs that were at an end, and setting in motion of those which were about to begin, took place in the library late in the afternoon, when all the strangers had departed. The family lawyer, Colonel Fleetwood, who was Lady Markham's brother, and old Mr. Markham of Edge, the head of the hostile branch

which had hoped to inherit everything before Sir William married and showed them their mistake—were the only individuals present along with Lady Markham, Paul, and Alice. There was nothing exciting about the reading of this will; no fear of eccentric dispositions, or of any arrangement different from the just and natural one. Besides, the family knew what it was before it was read. It was merely a part of the sad ceremonial which had to be gone through like the rest. Lady Markham had placed herself as far from the table as possible, with her face turned to the door. She could not bear, yet, to look straight at her husband's vacant place. Her brother stood behind her, leaning thoughtfully against her chair, and Alice was on a low seat by her side. The deep mourning of both the ladies made the paleness which grief and watching had brought more noticeable. Alice had begun to regain a little delicate colour, but her mother was still wan and worn. And they were very weary with the excitement of the gloomy day, and anxious to get away and conclude all these agitating ceremonials. Lady Markham kept her eyes on the door. Her loss was too recent to seem natural. What so likely as that he

should come in suddenly, and wonder to see them all collected there?—so much more likely, so much more natural than to believe that for ever he was gone away.

And in the quiet the lawyer began to read—nothing to rouse them, nothing they did not know; his voice, monotonous and calm, seemed to be reading another kind of dull burial service, unbeautiful, without any consolation in it, but full of the heavy, level cadence of ashes to ashes and dust to dust. Paul stirred, almost impatiently, from time to time, and changed his position; it affected his nerves. And sometimes Colonel Fleetwood would give forth a sigh, which meant impatience too; but the others did not move. Lady Markham's beautiful profile, marble pale, shone like a white cameo upon the dark background of the curtains. She was scarcely conscious what they were doing, submitting to this last duty of all.

When the door opened, which it did, somewhat hastily, it startled the whole party. Lady Markham sat up in her chair and uttered a low cry. Paul turned round angrily. He turned to find fault with the servant who was thus interrupting a solemn conference;

but when he saw who the intruder really was, the young man lost all patience.

"This fellow again!" he said under his breath; and he made one stride towards the door, where stood, closing it carefully behind him, while he faced the company, Mr. Gus in his black suit. He was no coward; he faced the young man, whom he had already exasperated, without flinching—putting up his hand with a deprecating, but not undignified, gesture. Paul, who had meant nothing less than to eject him forcibly, came to a sudden stop, and stood hesitating, uncertain, before the self-possessed little figure. What could he do? He was in his house, where discourtesy was a crime.

"Keep your temper, Paul Markham," said the little gentleman; "I mean you no harm. You and I can't help damaging each other; but for heaven's sake, this day, and before *them*, let's settle it with as little disturbance as we can."

"What does this mean?" said Colonel Fleetwood: while the lawyer rested his papers on the table, and looked on, across them, without putting them out of his hand.

"I can't tell what it means," cried Paul. "This is the second time this man has burst into our company, at the most solemn moment, when my father was dying——"

"Mr. Gaveston," said Lady Markham, in her trembling voice, "I have told you that anything we can do for you, any amends we can make—— But oh, would it not be better to choose another time—to come when we are alone—when there need be no exposure?"

"My Lady Markham," said Gus, advancing to the table, "I don't know what you mean, but you are under a great mistake. It is no fault of yours, and I am sorry for Paul. I might have been disposed to accept a compromise before I saw the place; but anyhow, compromise or not, I must establish my rights."

"This is the most extraordinary interruption of a family in their own house," said Colonel Fleetwood. "What does it mean? Isabel, you seem to know him; who is this man?"

"That is just what she does not know," said Gus, calmly; "and what I've come to tell you. Nothing can be more easy; I have all the evidence here, which your lawyer can examine at once. I wrote to my father

when I arrived, but he took no notice. I am Sir Augustus Markham: Sir William Markham's eldest son—and heir."

Lady Markham rose up appalled—her lips falling apart, her eyes opened wide in alarm, her hands clasped together. Paul, whose head had been bent down, started, and raised it suddenly, as if he had not heard rightly.

"Good God!" cried Colonel Fleetwood.

Mr. Scrivener, the lawyer, put down his papers carefully on the table, and rose from his seat.

"The man must be out of his senses," he said.

Mr. Gus looked round upon them all with excitement, in which there was a gleam of triumph. "I am not out of my senses. With such a wrong done to me I might have been; but I never knew of it till lately. And, mind you, I don't blame *them* as if they knew it. If you are the lawyer, I have brought you all the papers, honest and above-board. There they are, my mother's certificates and mine. Ask anybody in the island of Barbadoes," cried Mr. Gus; "bless you, it was not done in a corner; it was never made a secret of. From the Governor to the meanest black, there isn't one but knows it all as well as I."

He had thrust a packet of papers into Mr. Scrivener's hand, and now stood with one arm extended, like a speaker addressing with energetic, yet conciliatory warmth, a hostile assembly. But no one paid any attention to Mr. Gus. The interest had gone from him to the lawyer who was opening up with care and precaution the different papers. Colonel Fleetwood stood behind Mr. Scrivener eagerly reading them over his shoulder, chafing at his coolness. "Get on, can't you?" he cried, under his breath. They were enough to appal the inexperienced eye. To this astonished spectator looking on, the lines of the marriage certificate seemed to blaze as if written in fire. It was as if a bolt from heaven had fallen among them. The chief sufferers themselves were stunned by the shock of a sudden horror which they did not realise. What did it mean? A kind of pale light came over Lady Markham's face: she began to remember the Lennys and their eccentric visit. She put out her hand as one who has begun to grasp a possible clue.

At this moment of intense and painful bewilderment, a sudden chuckle burst into the quiet. It was poor old Mr. Markham, whose hopes had been disappointed, who

had never forgiven Sir William Markham's children for being born. "Gad! I always felt sure there was a previous marriage," he said, mumbling with old toothless jaws. Only the stillness of such a pause would have made this senile voice of malice audible. Even the old man himself was abashed to hear how audible it was.

"A previous marriage!" Colonel Fleetwood went hurriedly to his sister, and took her by the shoulders in fierce excitement, as if she could be to blame. "What does this mean, Isabel?" he cried; "did you know of it? did you consent to it? does it mean, my God! that you have never been this man's wife at all?"

She turned upon him with a flash of energy and passion. "How dare you speak of my husband so—my husband who was honour itself and truth?" Then the poor lady covered her face with her hands. Her heart sank, her strength forsook her. Who could tell what hidden things might be revealed by the light of this sudden horrible illumination. "I can't tell you. I do not know! I do not know!"

"This will never do," said Mr. Scrivener hurriedly. "This is pre-judging the case altogether. No one can

imagine that with no more proof than these papers (which may be genuine or not, I can't say on the spur of the moment) we are going to believe a wild assertion which strikes at the honour of a family——"

"Look here," said Mr. Gus; his mouth began to get dry with excitement, he could scarcely get out the words. "Look here, there's nothing about the honour of the family. There's nothing to torment *her* about. Do you hear, you, whoever you are! My mother, Gussy Gaveston, died five and thirty years ago, when I was born. Poor little thing," cried the man who was her son, with a confusion of pathos and satisfaction, "it was the best thing she could do. She wasn't one to live and put other people to shame, not she. She was a bit of a girl, with no harm in her. The man she married was a young fellow of no account, no older than him there, Paul, my young brother; but all the same she would have been Lady Markham had she lived; and I am her son that cost her her life, the only one of the first family, Sir William's eldest. That's easily seen when you look at us both," he added with a short laugh; "there can't be much doubt, can there, which is the eldest, I or he?"

Here again there was a strange pause. Colonel Fleetwood, who was the spectator who had his wits about him, turned round upon old Mr. Markham, who ventured to chuckle again in echo of poor Gus's harsh little laugh, which meant no mirth. "What the devil do you find to laugh at?" he said, his lip curling over his white teeth with rage, to which he could give vent no other way. But he was relieved of his worst fear, and he could not help turning with a certain interest to the intruder. Gus was not a noble figure in his old-fashioned long-tailed black-coat, with his formal air; but there was not the least appearance of imposture about him. The serene air of satisfaction and self-importance which returned to his face when the excitement of his little speech subsided, his evident conviction that he was in his right place, and confidence in his position, contradicted to the eyes of the man of the world all suggestion of fraud. He might be deceived: but he himself believed in the rights he was claiming, and he was not claiming them in any cruel way.

As for Paul, since his first angry explanation he had not said a word. The young man looked like a man in a dream. He was standing leaning against the mantel-

piece, every tinge of colour gone out of his face, listening, but hardly seeming to understand what was said. He had watched his mother's movements, his uncle's passionate appeal to her, but he had not stirred. As a matter of fact the confusion in his mind was such that nothing was clear to him. He felt as if he had fallen and was still falling, from some great height into infinite space. His feet tingled, his head was light. The sounds around him seemed blurred and uncertain, as well as the faces. While he stood thus bewildered, two arms suddenly surrounded his, embracing it, clinging to him. Paul pressed these clinging hands mechanically to his side, and felt a certain melting, a softness of consolation and support. But whether it was Dolly whispering comfort to him in sight of his father's grave, or Alice bidding him take courage in the midst of a new confusing imbroglio of pain and excitement, he could scarcely have told. Then, however, voices more distinct came to him, voices quite steady and calm, in their ordinary tones.

"After this interruption it will be better to go no further," the lawyer said. "I can only say that I will consult with my clients, and meet Mr.——, this

gentleman's solicitor, on the subject of the extraordinary claim he makes."

"If it is me you mean, I have no solicitor," said Mr. Gus, "and I don't see the need of one. What have you got to say against my papers? They are straightforward enough."

The lawyer was moved to impatience.

"It is ridiculous," he said, "to think that a matter of this importance—the succession to a great property—can be settled in such a summary way. There is a great deal more necessary before we get that length. Lady Markham, I don't think we need detain you longer."

But no one moved. Lady Markham had sunk into her chair too feeble to stand. Her eyes were fixed upon her son and daughter standing together. They seemed to have floated away from her on the top of this wave of strange invasion. She thought there was anger on Paul's pale stern face, but her heart was too faint to go to them, to take the part she ought to take. Did they think she was to blame? How was she to blame? She almost thought so herself as she looked pathetically across the room at her children, who seemed to have forsaken her. Mr. Scrivener made

a great rustling and scraping, tying up his papers, putting them together—these strange documents along with the others; for Gus had made no effort to retain them. The lawyer felt with a sinking of his heart that the last doubt of the reality of this claim was removed when the claimant allowed him to keep the certificates which proved his case. In such a matter only men who are absolutely honest put faith in others. "He is not afraid of any appeal to the registers," Mr. Scrivener said to himself. He made as much noise as he could over the tying up of these papers; but nobody moved to go. At last he took out his watch and examined it.

"Can any one tell me about the trains to town?" he said.

This took away all excuse from old Mr. Markham, who very unwillingly put himself in motion.

"I must go too," he said. "Can I put you down at the station?"

And then these two persons stood together for a minute or more comparing their watches, of which one was a little slow and the other a little fast.

"I think perhaps it will suit me better," the lawyer said, "to wait for the night train."

Then the other reluctantly took his leave.

"I am glad that anyhow it can make no difference to you," he said, pressing Lady Markham's hand; "that would have been worse, much worse, than anything that can happen to Paul."

The insult made her shrink and wince, and this pleased the revengeful old man who had never forgiven her marriage. Then he went to Mr. Gus with a great show of friendliness.

"We're relations, too," he said, "and I hope will be friends. Can I set you down anywhere?"

Mr. Gus looked at him with great severity and did not put out his hand.

"I can't help hurting them, more or less," he said, "for I've got to look after my own rights; but if you think I'll make friends with any one that takes pleasure in hurting them—— I am much obliged to you," Mr. Gus added with much state, "but I am at home, and I don't want to be set down anywhere."

These words, which were quite audible, sent a thrill of amazement through the room. Colonel Fleetwood and Mr. Scrivener looked at each other. Notwithstanding the ruin and calamity which surrounded them,

a gleam of amusement went over the lawyer's face. Gus was moving about restlessly, hovering round the brother and sister who had not changed their position, like a big blue-bottle, moving in circles. He was not at all unlike a blue-bottle in his black coat. Mr. Scrivener went up to him, arresting him in one of his flights.

"I should think—" said the lawyer, "don't you agree with me?—that the family would prefer to be left alone after such an exciting and distressing day?"

"Eh! the family? Yes, that is quite my opinion. You outsiders ought to go, and leave us to settle matters between us," said Gus.

He scarcely looked at the lawyer, so intent was he upon Paul and Alice, who were still standing together, supporting each other. The little man was undisguisedly anxious to listen to what Alice was saying in her brother's ear.

"I am their adviser," said Mr. Scrivener. "I cannot leave till I have done all I can for them; but you Mr.——"

"Sir Augustus, if you please," said the little gentleman, drawing himself up. "If you are their adviser, I, sir, am their brother. You seem to forget that. The

family is not complete without me. Leave them to me, and there is no fear but everything will come straight."

Mr. Scrivener looked at this strange personage with a kind of consternation. He was half afraid of him, half amused by him. The genuineness of him filled the lawyer with dismay. He could not entertain a hope that a being so true was false in his pretensions. Besides, there were various things known perhaps only to Mr. Scrivener himself which gave these pretensions additional weight. He shook his head when Colonel Fleetwood, coming up to him on the other side, whispered to him an entreaty to "get the fellow to go." How was he to get the fellow to go? He had not only right, but kindness and the best of intentions on his side.

"My dear sir," he said, perplexed, "you must see, if you think, that your claim, even if true, cannot be accepted in a moment as you seem to expect. We must have time to investigate; any one may call himself Sir William Markham's son."

"But no one except myself can prove it," said Gus, promptly; "and, my dear sir, to use your own words, you had better leave my family to me, as I tell you. I

know better than any one else how to manage them. Are they not my own flesh and blood?"

"That may or may not be," said the lawyer, at the end of his reasoning.

It was easy to say "get him to go away," but unless he ejected him by sheer force, he did not see how it was to be done. As for Mr. Gus, he himself saw that the time was come for some further step. First he buttoned his coat as preparing for action, and put down his hat, with its huge hat-band, upon the table. Then he hesitated for a moment between Lady Markham and the young people; finally he said to himself reflectively, almost sadly, "What claim have I upon her?" He moved a step towards Paul and Alice, and cleared his throat.

And it was now that Providence interposed to help the stranger. Just as he had made up his mind to address the young man whom he had superseded, there came a sound of footsteps at the door. It was opened a very little, timidly, and through the chink Bell's little soft voice (she was always the spokeswoman) was heard with a little sobbing catch in it, pleading—

"May we come in now, mamma?"

The children thought everybody was gone. They

had been huddled up, out of the way, it seemed, for weeks. They were longing for their natural lives, for their mother, for some way out of the strangeness and desolation of this unnatural life they had been leading. They were all in the doorway, treading upon each other's heels in their eagerness, but subdued by the influences about which took the courage out of them. It seemed to Mr. Gus an interposition of Providence on his behalf. He went quickly to the door and opened to them, then returned, leading one of the little girls in each hand.

"I told you I was a relation," he said very gravely and kindly, with a certain dignity which now and then took away all that was ridiculous in him. "I am your brother, though you would not think it; your poor dear father who is gone was my father too. He was my father when he was not much older than Paul. I should like to be very fond of you all if you would let me. I would not hurt one of you for the world. Will you give me a kiss, because I am your brother, Bell and Marie?"

The children looked at him curiously with their big eyes, which they had made so much larger with crying. They looked pale and fragile in their black frocks, with their anxious little faces turned up to him.

"Our brother!" they both said in a breath, wondering; but they did not shrink from the kiss he gave, turning with a quivering of real emotion from one to another.

"Yes, my dears," he said, "and a good brother I'll be to you, so help me God!" the little gentleman's brown face got puckered and tremulous, as if he would cry. "I don't want to harm anybody," he said. "I'll take care of the boys as if they were my own. I'll do anything for Paul that he'll let me, though I can't give up my rights to him; and I'll be fond of you all if you let me," cried Mr. Gus, dropping the hands of the children, and holding out his own to the colder, more difficult, audience round him. They all stood looking at him, with keen wonder, opposition, almost hatred. Was it possible they could feel otherwise to the stranger who thus had fallen among them, taking everything that they thought was theirs out of their hands?

END OF VOL. II.

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